



NOVEL
1

Free Life? Fantasy

IMMORTAL PRINCESS

Online

WRITTEN BY AKISUZU NENOHI
ILLUSTRATED BY SHERRY



Table of Contents

[Color Gallery](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyrights and Credits](#)

[Table of Contents Page](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1: The Character Creator](#)

[Chapter 2: My Catacomb Home](#)

[Chapter 3: Searching the Catacombs](#)

[Official BBS 1](#)

[Chapter 4: Evolution](#)

[Chapter 5: Evolution and Equipment](#)

[Official BBS 2](#)

[Chapter 6: Starting Town Monday-Friday](#)

[Chapter 7: Saturday Morning](#)

[Chapter 8: Saturday Afternoon](#)

[Official BBS 3](#)

[Chapter 9: Sunday Morning](#)

[Chapter 10: Sunday Afternoon](#)

[Chapter 11: Saturday Morning](#)

[Chapter 12: Saturday Afternoon](#)

[Chapter 13: The Defense of the Starting Town](#)

[Official BBS 4](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Afterword](#)



I'm back at it the next day as soon as I get home from school.

Once my catacombs mapping is done, I'll prioritize leveling up and evolving.

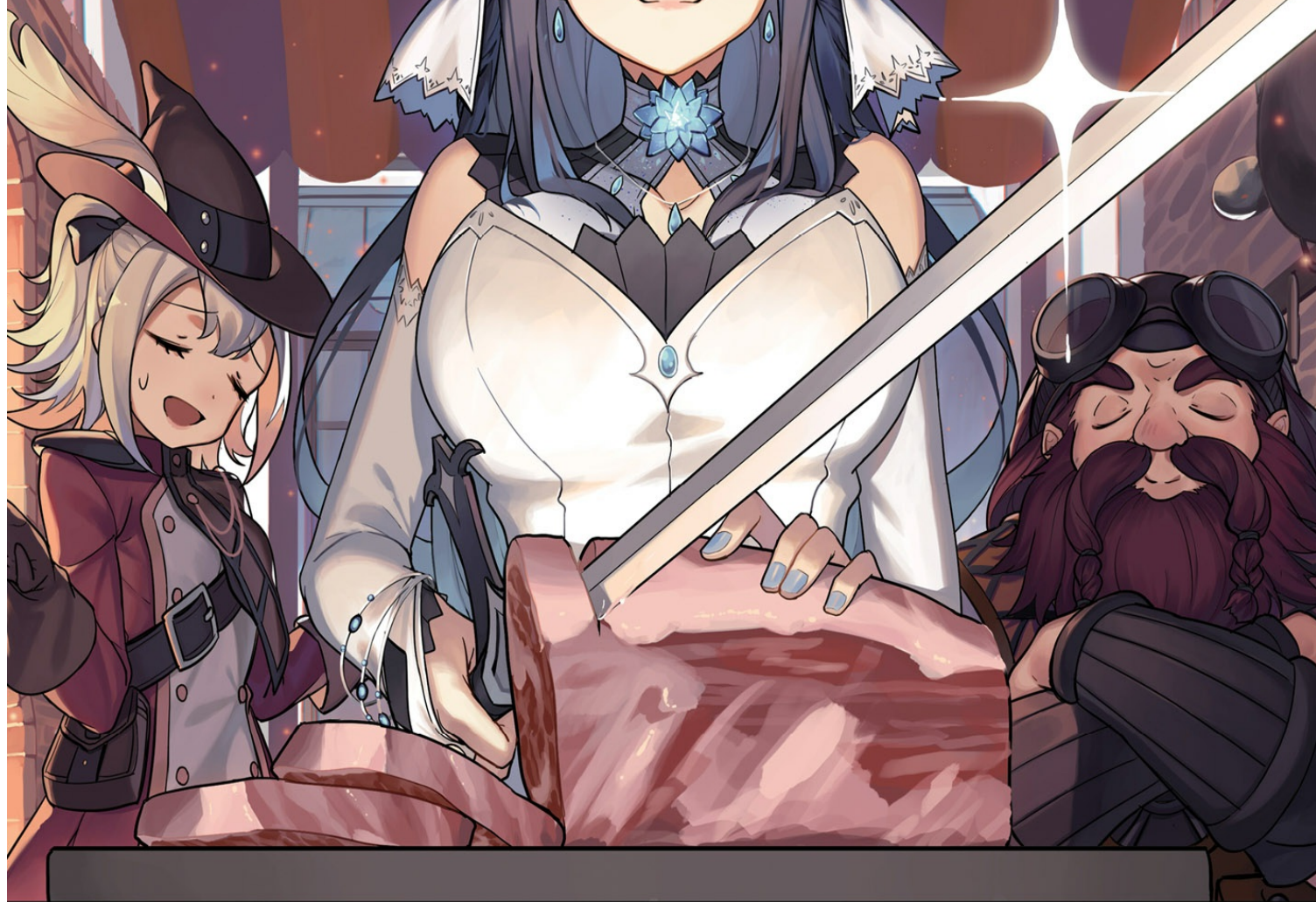
"Distance
Sword!"

A crescent haze arcs
from the tip of my rapier,
flying straight at the
goblin general.



“Can we talk about
how my sister is
using a sword to
slice meat...?”

“Oh, you’ll get
used to it.”





Free Life Fantasy

IMMORTAL PRINCESS Online



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SHERRY



Seven Seas Entertainment



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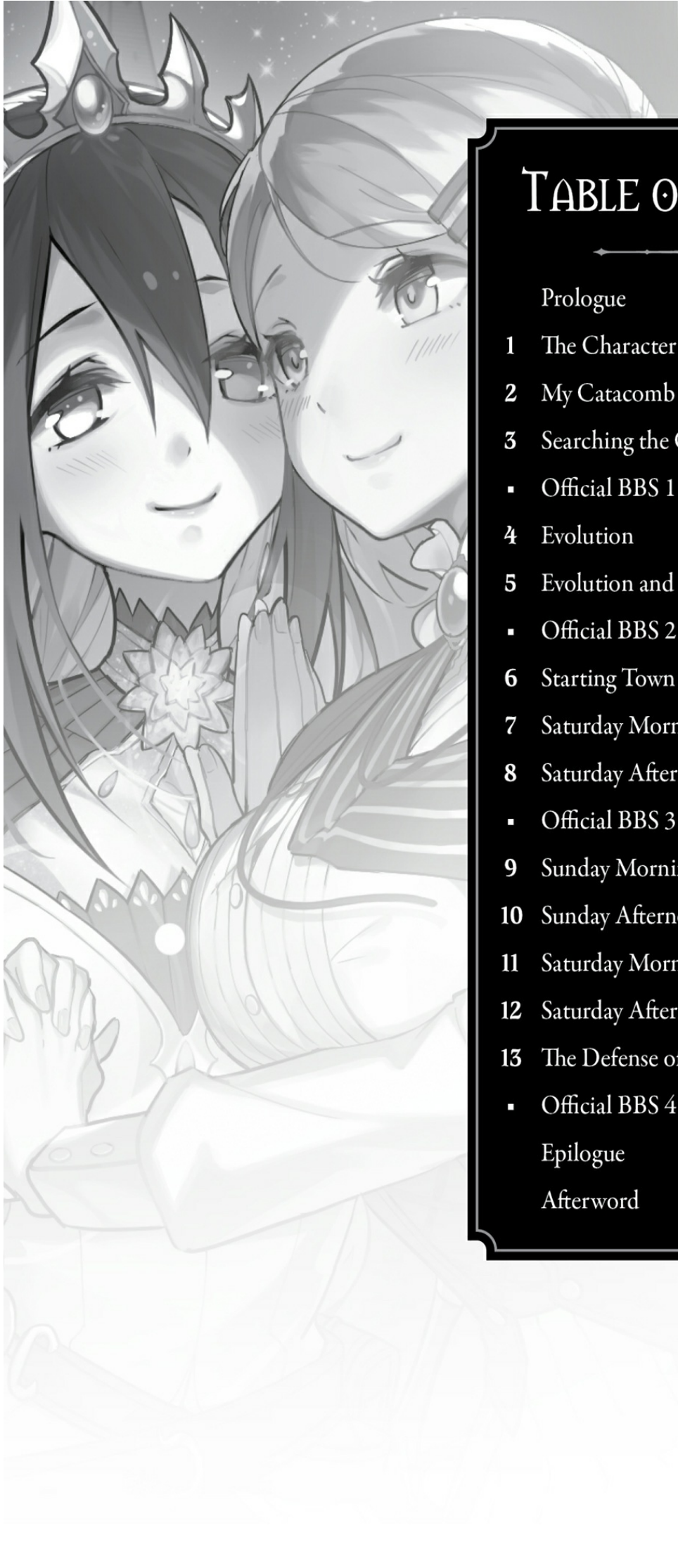


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue

- 1 The Character Creator
- 2 My Catacomb Home
- 3 Searching the Catacombs
 - Official BBS 1
- 4 Evolution
- 5 Evolution and Equipment
 - Official BBS 2
- 6 Starting Town Monday-Friday
- 7 Saturday Morning
- 8 Saturday Afternoon
 - Official BBS 3
- 9 Sunday Morning
- 10 Sunday Afternoon
- 11 Saturday Morning
- 12 Saturday Afternoon
- 13 The Defense of the Starting Town
 - Official BBS 4

Epilogue

Afterword

Prologue

DING-DONG! The doorbell lets out a familiar chime.

“Who is it?” I ask the usual question through the household intercom.

“Package delivery!”

I push the button to unlock the gate and clear the way for the young deliveryman, who carries a decently sized box to the front door. It’s addressed to...oh, to Tsukishiro Akina. It seems to be for my younger sister.

“Have a nice day!”

“Thanks. I’ll be off then.”

The deliveryman is quickly on his way. I make sure the gate and front door are both firmly locked before summoning my sister from the second floor. Glancing down as I carry the box into the living room, I see it was sent from Future Software. It says it’s the grand prize of a tournament. She must have won something—again. I, myself, dabble in games a bit, but my sister casts a wide net: She’s into a bit of everything, whether she’s online, offline, or playing some tabletop.

“Oh! It’s finally here?!”

“You got a pretty big one this time.”

There’s the pitter-patter of my sister’s feet as Akina races down the steps and majestically tears the tape from the cardboard box. The flaps open to reveal three smaller boxes tucked inside.

“Just what I was looking for! All right, Sis. This one’s for *you*.”



“Hmm? Isn’t it your prize, Akina?”

“It is, but I chose the game and console set. You were eyeing this one, yeah? It’s the limited-run special edition! *THE* special edition!!! Nice, right?”

“Oh, that game from the commercials, right?”

“Yeah, FLFO! They had a tournament in the beta.”

Free Life Fantasy Online—a.k.a FLFO for short. It’s Japan’s first Full Dive Virtual Reality Massive Multiplayer Online Game, most commonly known as a FDVRMMO. Quite a number of large corporations were involved in the development process right from its initial conception. Their unified approach could be summarized as this: “Just leave it to the professionals!”

As such, the in-game vegetables were recreated with the help of farmers, the cooking skill and methods with chefs, carpentry with carpenters, smithing with swordsmiths...et cetera, et cetera, you get it. Apparently, all sorts of specialists were called in to make everything authentic.

It was Future Software, the game’s main developer and supervisor, who poured all these resources into a single game—but if you ask me, the players don’t really care about all that as long as it’s *fun*.

Of course, you can fight monsters with swords, bows, and magic, but the game also incorporates various production mechanics such as smithing, woodworking, cooking, and fishing. It is possible to buy a field to start a farm, and player housing is also one of the highlights. It’s also possible to play as a bandit or a pirate to enjoy the thrill of the PvP kill—the joy of hunting and being hunted down by NPCs and other players.

Though that’s not recommended.

With FLFO’s enormous selection of skills, it’s nearly impossible for two people to end up with the exact same build unless done intentionally. Players pick out their own skills rather than having them tethered to job classes. Essentially, the game sells itself on being a chance to live a second life in a fantasy world.

“Why did they send me *two* consoles though...? Maybe I should contact support. It might be their mistake, but it’s brand-new tech. I just hope they let

us keep the extra one.”

Though this is the first FDVRMMO from Japan, it is not the first VR game in general. Naturally, my sister already has her own console. Though not the latest model, hers is still more than capable of running the game. In any case, I believe they timed the newest hardware with the game’s release. As a result, the company sent two of these headsets and one limited-edition copy of the game.

“Anyway, don’t you worry about that. Service starts tomorrow, so you use that one, Sis. FLFO’s a full dive game, so even you should be fine with the controls!”

“Let’s see, let’s see...” I began rummaging through the box for the hardware.

As I did, Akina ran upstairs eagerly, saying, “I’ll go send in a support ticket!” I’m sure the game needs to be initialized; I would rather handle the setup sooner than later. Official service starts tomorrow—Saturday at noon, to be specific.

I quickly flip through the user’s manual on the VR equipment. *To initialize, please lie down on a bed and follow the verbal instructions. The scan will be more precise if you input your height, weight, and proportions as accurately as possible.*

That sounds like quite a pain. I’ll just put down whatever I remember off the top of my head. No need to measure myself. Moving on—oh, looks like you can set alarms. If you have dinner scheduled at 7:00 p.m., it will notify you in-game. All right, I’ll set a few right now!

Moving on to the game box, I’m greeted with a loosely written disclaimer as soon as I pop open the lid.

This game is a Full Dive Virtual Reality Massive Multiplayer Online Game—a FDVRMMO. Please be aware that a VR console and internet connection are required to play this game.

※ IF THIS IS YOUR FIRST ONLINE GAME EXPERIENCE ※

Please avoid any conversations and topics that may give away your identity or

any sensitive personal information. The jeopardization of your real-world personal information may affect immersion and gameplay. When playing with friends, be mindful to call one another by your in-game character names only.

Please keep in mind that other players are human, just like you. Be considerate of your fellow players and avoid rudeness and unpleasantness.

Some people like to roleplay—this means that they try to act out the part of their character. If their actions are incomprehensible to you, please ask them to explain their mannerisms in secret in order to avoid breaking their immersion. Also, it's considered a breach of game etiquette to call it "roleplaying." This may cause negative feelings and further affect immersion in the game.

Please note that in some circumstances, actions such as stalking and harassment may lead to legal consequences in the real world.

Observe proper netiquette and have fun!

To all parents and guardians, please explain everything thoroughly to your children, as per the agreement with management and these guidelines. You can find further information on our official website...

It's not my first online game, so I already have a general idea of what to do, but it looks like they actually needed to change the laws with the release of an FDVRMMO. I'll need to be careful when and how I play. Oh, wait—that's all they wrote...? Do they really want me to check their website for more info?

A smaller sheet of paper has what it calls a "Limited Edition Starting Dash" campaign code on it. Looks like you start off with an extra bit of money, a basic set of consumables, and a premium character customizer. Hmm, doesn't look like you get anything too special. Then again, it *is* an online game. That's about what you'd expect from bonuses.

Pitter-patter! Pitter-patter! Well, that sound means Akina is back downstairs. "There's a bonus code. Do you want it?"

"You can have it, Sis. Beta testers have even *better* perks! We get to carry over all our money, and even a few items too."

“Oh, that’s right. By the way, what’s this premium character customizer?”

“That’s one of the few cash shop items. You get a few more options in the character creator. Beta testers started off with an unrestricted creator, so I’m all good.”

“I see. Then I guess I’ll keep it.”

You’ve got mail! chimes the connection board Akina brought down with her.

“Hmm? Oh, a reply! And quick service too. Ah, you love to see it! Management’s so generous, hooray!”

“They’re letting you keep it?”

“Actually, they originally sent one out for *both* of us.”

“Hmm?”

“Well, I told them I wanted the console so I could give it to my sister.”

“Oh, so I see.”

“By the way, I’ll get banned if you sell it, so don’t even *think* about it, Sis!”

“I’m not going to sell a gift, Akina.”

“Then I’m gonna go initialize mine right now! Catch ya later!” Akina quickly scampers up the steps, cardboard box in hand.

“Have fun! You know, I guess I should try this out too...”

Sometimes, I think Akina took all the energy in the family and left me with the mellow vibes. One quiet older sister and an active younger sibling—what a pair we are! The biggest difference is that I have our dad’s fairer skin and hair while my sister has our mother’s Japanese features. Our mom met dad while she was working overseas: My sister and I are both half-Japanese. All that said, I get along with Akina well enough. And despite her personality and looks, Akina does actually think things through, so I’m not too concerned about her future.

Now then, it’s about time to configure the device. After placing all the loose papers back into their respective boxes, I carry them up to my room. It’s quite a simple place, furnished with a bed, a shelf, a round table, and a large floor cushion. There are a few animal plushies by the pillow. I tend to like darker

colors, the complete opposite of my sister's tastes.

I take out the main console unit, plug in the power cord, and connect it to the internet. It's not like I'm going to be doing a lot of moving, and since I need a good connection, Ethernet it is. Thankfully, the cord is long enough to accommodate me.

Now, let's make an account while it charges. Email, username: Oh, there's a space for my special-edition code! Hmm, yes, yes, that should do it. Quite a bit of time passes as I scroll through Future Soft's newsfeed. Once I'm done, the device is powered up enough for me to use it.

I lie on the bed and equip the VR headset. It's like a headset and visor that covers my ears and eyes. The equipment was made with the idea that you'd be lying on your back, so all of the important parts are on the front so the user can lie comfortably. Also, it was designed so that your nose and mouth are clear, letting you breathe easy while immersed in the game.

Welcome to Free Life Fantasy Online! I am your support AI. We will now proceed to the virtual reality setup. Please fill out the necessary fields.

Instead of typing like in the real world, I just have to think what I want to say to enter the data wherever the AI directs me to.

Your physical information can be a rough estimate. We will only reference during the scan.

My height is 158 centimeters, I think. Weight...hmm, I think I weighed around 52 kilograms last I checked. To be honest, I really haven't weighed myself lately. My bust size is...well, it's a number. All right, next is my waist, then my hips. Mmm, I think that should do it.

Please do not use any pillows while the scan is being conducted. Additionally, please remove any blankets and lie as still and relaxed as possible. For feminine players, we recommend wearing clothing that follows your body lines or advise conducting the scan in your undergarments for more accurate measurements. Would you like to begin the scan?

Okay, okay, gimme a second. Now, let's tuck in the pillow in the corner and take off the blanket. My clothes, well...it's springtime anyway, so off they go.

Let me just shift things a bit more and make sure I'm lying flat. All right, that should be good.

Commencing scan. Please wait.

There's silence, only occasionally broken by the electronic chime of the AI's voice as it announces its progress each time it passes a multitude of ten. *10 percent...40 percent...70 percent...and then...*

Scan complete.

Height: 160 centimeters. Weight: 54 kilograms. Bust— Whatever personal data this AI *politely* tells me, I *politely* ignore, eventually hitting "OK." After that, a hologram of myself gets constructed right before my eyes. It's a truly familiar sight, though the colors are all wrong. Despite my Japanese heritage, my eyes and hair color aren't *black*, you know. Though I must admit, the scan was quite precise in nearly everything else. I carefully ignore it and hit okay.

This is your basic data. It will be utilized in various ways during your gameplay experience. When playing a game, it will be read by the character creator and used as a basis over which you can add personal customizations. It is possible to update your basic data as necessary.

Well, looks like that's it for initialization. So quick!

The system has been configured. What would you like to do next?

Next, let's install the game.

Please select your method of installation.

Well, I have a physical copy, so I don't have to download it. I squirm around and insert it into the console.

Reading data. The disk has been identified as Free Life Fantasy Online. Genre: FDVRMMO. Would you like to begin installation?

Yes! Of course I would!

Initializing installation. Expected time remaining: two hours. You may now remove the VR headset or use it to load other software. Please note that because the installation process will continue in the background, you may experience stuttering or lag while using other software.

Ah, time to take it off, especially since it's almost time to eat. Plus, it's not like I have anything else to do in VR right now. So, after doing a bit of this and that IRL, I return to find the installation is complete. Now all that's left is to link my account to the game, apply the Day One patch, and wait for FLFO to go fully online.

Eagerly, I start gathering information only to realize that nighttime has come. I get up, stretch, and prepare to go to sleep.

Chapter 1:

The Character Creator

LUNCH COMES A BIT EARLY the next day since service starts at noon and Akina doesn't want to miss even a *second* of it.

"Oh, right. When you boot up the game, make sure you check the unwanted contact blocker in the options menu."

"Unwanted contact blocker...?"

"It's an anti-harassment feature. There are a few different presets, so make sure you have it turned on. It makes it so you don't feel like you've been touched, and the other guy feels like he's up against an invisible wall."

"I see. It is full dive technology, after all. Guess there's a lot to consider."

"Yes, and someone like you absolutely needs it, Sis. Also, make sure you whitelist me!"

"Oh, there's a whitelist?"

"There's a setting that disables it against friends and exceptions. I'll still receive a warning if I go too far, though."

"Naturally."

"By the way, you can change values by a maximum of five centimeters in the character creator. Also, everyone ends up looking a bit 2D in-game."

"I see."

"Oh! It's starting!"

"Yeah!"

Akina pitter-patters her way up the steps, and I get ready to head to my room as well. Thankfully, I was able to register her as a friend in advance when I was checking through the official website.

I put on the headset, lie down on my bed in a comfortable position, and

power up the game device.

Good morning. What would you like to do today?

I'd like to load FLFO.

Performing a pre-boot check. The device and user are confirmed to be in a safe position. Launching Free Life Fantasy Online.

The game starts up quite smoothly. Though the title screen is displayed, it's overlaid by a quite conspicuous countdown. The numbers are gyrating...now they're bouncing...oh, they've even begun to spin. You *really* don't want me to read the title, do you Future Soft? Not like I don't already know it...

When there are only ten seconds remaining, the numbers suddenly change into rapidly shifting psychedelic rainbows and start to jump around even faster. Perhaps because of the full dive immersion, the counter—or rather my perception of it—seems to speed up the as the countdown nears zero. Once it's down to five seconds, the digits begin to swell until...

Bang!!

I'll give it to Future Software; that one got me, even if I knew what to expect. Anyway, that far-too-attention-grabbing countdown is gone, so let's begin!

Once I move on from the title screen, the scenery changes to a clearing in a deep green forest. It's quite a wonderful, serene sight, what with all the sunlight filtering through the tree branches. Though it doesn't really give off a sense of fantasy...

Welcome to the world of Free Life Fantasy Online! Now let's make your character, which serves as your avatar in this world. Your premium character customizer will be used at this time.

The voice seems to come directly into my head. It's writing information straight into my brain...! Guess that's just how complex FDVR really is.

My avatar first displays as the basic data entered when I initialized the device on various slates of information floating in the air. I try fiddling with them, but honestly, I'm just making it worse. Looks like I'll have to reset things. Actually, how about I just change the hairstyle and skin tone? Otherwise, I'm going to

have a real monstrous creation on my hands. I feel pretty confident in my beautification skills—I take all my mom’s advice on caring for my body.

Pigtails are more geared toward younger children. Hmm, the ponytail doesn’t look so bad. In real life, my hair just about reaches my shoulders, so it’s interesting to see all the new things I can try. An afro is pushing it a little bit—it’s kind of amusing just how unsuitable and inappropriate it is for me. Same goes for the mohawk. How about I make the bangs blunt-cut and give myself a princess hairstyle. Ugh, no, that’s not to my tastes in the *least*.

In the end, it’s best to just keep it simple. Let’s keep what I have, just make it longer. It’s a pain to wash my hair once it grows longer than my shoulders, and it catches on all sorts of things, so I would never do this in real life—but maybe it’s different in-game. Let’s see it down my back...now down to my hips...next my knees...wow! I can grow it all the way to the ground...! I’m not going to trip on all this hair, am I?

It is possible to tie or cut your hair however you like in-game, but it is not currently possible to regrow it longer.

Oh, so I see. Then let’s go all out and have it down to my calves. I’m not doing much with the bangs, but I’ll make the sides a bit longer...aaaaand there! Let’s set the finish to “glossy” and the hair color to black. Oh, and the eyes to a bright purple. Mmm...outright purple is a little finicky. Should I make it reddish-purple, or bluish-purple...? Yeah, let’s put it more on the blue side of things.

That looks good. Let’s save and continue.

Please select your race. Please note that modifications will be applied to your current character model based on your chosen racial group.

Jeez...this game has a really wide selection of races.

HUMAN:

A very average race.

If you’re ever in doubt about what to choose, give humanity a go.

BEASTMAN:

Gains a different specialty depending on the species.

Wolf: Specializes in Strength

Rabbit: Specializes in Dexterity

Bear: Specializes in Endurance

Fox: Specializes in Intelligence

Cat: Specializes in Agility

DWARF:

A race known for their high Strength and Dexterity. However, their movement speed is quite slow.

Recommended for crafters.

ELF:

The glass cannons of FLFO, they have high Intelligence and Dexterity but can't take a hit.

Recommended for ranged combat.

GIANT:

Creatures with high Strength and Endurance, though they're very clumsy.

Use your size to your advantage.

MACHINA:

Known as "the armored ones" or "the automatons," these creations boast high stats overall but are abysmal at casting and resisting magic.

Hmm, it's exactly what I saw online. It doesn't look like anything's changed from the beta.

The beastman race can be widely customized, ranging from just ears and tails to full bipedal animals—much to the joy of the online furry community. However, it seems that every species, apart from foxes, have low intelligence in exchange for an enhanced sense of sight and smell.

Dwarves—perhaps due to their shorter legs and stature—are said to gain less speed than the other races for every point invested in agility. Whether this is due to physical differences or an actual adjusted formula, only the company knows for sure. The speed difference was first theorized when two freshly created characters held a race with their initial equipment and the same stat investment.

Elves are, as stated, glass cannons: They can't take a hit to save their lives. Rumor has it that they gain fewer hit points per investment. In contrast, giants gain an *enormous* amount of HP. As you might expect, they have towering builds ranging between two to three meters tall. With humans, two meters is just about the upper limit. And while you can generally adjust within five centimeters of your actual height, each race has its own built-in scaling features.

According to an official statement, people who are *actually* over two meters tall in reality can still be over two meters in-game.

Machina start out with stats that are overwhelmingly higher than any of the other races, but their MP growth is downright unsalvageable. Apparently, it isn't zero, but it might as well be considering how little they get. I guess they have high intelligence stats because they're machines—but they don't have the MP to make it useful. From what I could find, they operate on their own system of EP, or Energy Points.

In addition to all these options, the game also lets you select *inhuman* races, and there's a wide pool to choose from.

You have selected an inhuman race. These races are geared toward those who reject sanity.

The inhuman races are grotesque life-forms called monsters. They generally

have higher stats, though there's a wide spectrum. However, as they lack human traits, they come with certain *demerits*. For example, if you decide to play as a slime, it's apparently quite difficult just to learn to move properly.

But, on the other hand, the inhuman races grow faster than human classes and have their own unique evolution system to change race. With large enough changes, it is possible to get a complete skill rebuild in the process. However, a wide selection means a wide array of weaknesses as well.

It looks like the game designers took the stance of, "It's not our problem if you can hardly move. You're the one who chose to play as this race." But who knows; what was once a completely useless skill could become something incredible. Safe to say that this is mainly a route for those with dreams and patience.

During the beta, the inhuman forums were filled with cries of agony. It got so bad it was almost like listening in on the screams of hell itself. As a result, they didn't expect more than 10 percent of the player base to choose the inhuman races once official service began, and that was being *generous*.

User-controlled inhuman players have symbols over their heads so they can be told apart from game monsters by other players, and yet they were still relentlessly attacked and abused, with many players saying, "You're just a monster, you know. This doesn't count as a *real* player kill."

But it is an online game after all, and management insisted, "Please rest easy! All inhuman players will still be able to access towns the same as any other player, as long as they choose a race capable of human speech."

Naturally, the community retorted, "What was that last part?! That sounds pretty important!"

PvP is just an ordinary part of the game, of course. But the town residents—or rather, the NPCs—will treat inhuman players normally. It is still a *game*, and malicious player kills can be dealt with through user reports.

If you select an inhuman race, you may come across a map that is nearly impossible to clear due to your affinity. Those who want to avoid this are advised to choose a standard race.

I see, I see. Yet I still feel a bit drawn to the inhuman ones. What shall I do? A slime would be a test of patience until I'm able to evolve. A wolf...would a wolf be all right? A quadrupedal one, unlike the beastmen who stand upright. They're apparently quite strong... Well, maybe a horse...or a snake...or even a spider...?

But none of those can talk—that means they can't interact with NPCs. If you evolve into a centaur, an echidna, or an arachne, you gain a demi-human form so you can probably communicate. But even if you can level faster than normal races, how long will that take? That's *definitely* a problem.

Oh, goblins and skeletons can apparently talk. But where are the skeletons' vocal cords...? Okay, self, try not to think too hard about it. There are also mini golems, but I think they get bigger on evolution. Ugh, that sounds like it would be a real nuisance. A ghost—wait, how would I move?

Hmm, I'm going to have to make a choice eventually. But what? Eenie, meenie, zombie...*ho!*

You have selected zombie. As a member of the undead, there is a chance of you losing body parts. When this happens, you must use an in-game item to recover them.

This chance to lose limbs is one of the reasons undead is such an unpopular choice. If it's the same as the beta, then you don't lose limbs until level 10. Granted, zombies don't feel pain, so it won't hurt. Still, it's quite inconvenient.

Name: —

Race: *Zombie* ♀

Attribute: *Dark*

Genus: *Low Undead*

Species: *Zombie*

RACE (MONSTER) SKILLS:

***Physical Resistance Lv 1, Automatic HP Regen Lv 1, Low Undead,
Decomposing Body***

PHYSICAL RESISTANCE

Physical damage will be reduced based on skill level.

AUTOMATIC HP REGEN

HP will automatically recover based on skill level.

LOW UNDEAD

Receives continuous damage in sunlight. Damage is reduced in the shade.

Light and Holy Attribute Damage Received x4

Bonus to All Stats under Moonlight: Minor

Dark Attribute Enhancement: Minor

Dark Attribute Resistance: Minor

Increased Effectiveness of HP Regen Skills: Minor

Night Vision

Nullifies physical and mental status ailments. Does not require food or sleep.

DECOMPOSING BODY

Reduced feedback from the five senses. Constantly releases a musty, sludge-like stench that smells terrible—obviously. Those around you who smell the scent of your rotting flesh will vomit.

Fire Attribute Damage Received x2

I don't have much to say about Physical Resistance and Automatic HP Regen.

However, Low Undead looks quite strong. It nullifies status ailments that would be pointless against the dead. The problem is the continuous damage in sunlight, but perhaps I could offset that by increasing the skill level of my regeneration. The fact that it's low means there's probably a mid and high; I can't wait to see what evolution will throw at me!

The problem here is *definitely* Decomposing Body, but this is a zombie, after all. It's not a strange skill to have attached to that race. Decomposing Body has absolutely no benefits, but maybe it will go away if I evolve.

In Beta, the zombie race was so frustrating that people discarded their characters early on. They apparently broke when they found out that the next evolution stage was high zombie. As humanoids, they can talk, but they'd be beaten to a pulp by every beastman player they met due to that race's enhanced sense of smell.

Horses, snakes, and other animal types can't interact with the NPCs in town, but I hear they're still pretty fun to play. Something about how nice it is as a horse player to race across the open plains with another player on their back. Plus, you can have your friends buy goods for you.

There's also a cuckoo option—which is clearly just a *chicken*—and there's a chance for it to evolve into a cockatrice. Well, that one was just everyone's best guess since it was impossible to reach the required level in the beta. Still, that'd be something to look forward to.

Maybe I should just go with the unpopular zombie option. I could end up as a dragon zombie or even something like a bone dragon. Hmm, actually, a bone dragon would probably be down the skeleton race tree, not the zombie. Anyway, I like to solo and enjoy the experience on my own, so let's just go with it. Worst case scenario, I can delete my character and start all over again. In that case, I'll be locked out of FLFO for a few days as a penalty, but I don't really mind.

Sorry, Akina, your sister is joining the ranks of the undead. If you still have the courage to hug me in-game, you're welcome to do so. The zombie's appearance modifiers are pretty gnarly. My hair's going to be pretty sparse and my breasts are completely gone too. Putting the hair aside, it will be quite refreshing to

play without breasts. They've been with me for quite some time now; I don't mind giving them a break.

Please choose up to ten initial skills. If you skip this step, you can select them later in-game. As long as you have fewer than ten initial skills registered, you can learn eligible skills free of cost. Note that they will count as your initial skills.

Hmm, I think I'd like to pick them up as I play, but I guess starting with three can't hurt. I'll take Strength Boost, Endurance Boost, and Appraisal. You should never underestimate passive buffs, and Appraisal is essential for MMOs. The rest I'll just have to figure out as I progress. I feel like I'll hit a dead end if I don't pick out the right skills for a zombie.

As you have selected fewer than ten skills, the "Initial Skills" category has been added to your skills window. Please note that any skills that do not fall under this category will still have their usual cost. Your monster race skills are not counted.

I see. So if I want a skill, I can get it for free as long as it counts as an initial skill. If it doesn't, I'll have to pay the cost like normal. I guess that's to prevent players from taking high-level skills as their initials. Thankfully, all players share the same list of initial skills.

Please input your name.

Well, it's a fantasy world, so maybe something European would be suitable? I do have another name from my father's side of the family, but I shouldn't be using my *real* name, should I?

But maybe it will work? FLFO is a Japanese game. No one would ever guess that it's my actual name. That said, it's a pretty common name; I'll use it if it's not already taken. Apparently, the beta testers get to keep their old names.

Checking name availability for "Anastasia." Please wait.

The name entered is available.

Oh, it worked! Then let's go with that. It'll be quite refreshing to be called by my full name for once.

Are you satisfied with this appearance and skill set?

Name: Anastasia

Race: Zombie ♀ Lv 1

Attribute: Dark

Genus: Low Undead

Species: Zombie

SKILLS:

Strength Boost Lv 1, Endurance Boost Lv 1, Appraisal Lv 1

RACE (MONSTER) SKILLS:

Physical Resistance Lv 1, Automatic HP Regen Lv 1, Low Undead, Decomposing Body

My zombie self stands beside the status screen. Honestly, I'm not looking too good, but with the race modifiers, there's really not much I can do. Eh, it should all work out eventually.

You have selected one beyond the realm of humanity. This allows you to select a starting zone suitable to your race. Where would you like to start?

THE STARTING TOWN

The normal starting point. Same as humans.

RACIAL STARTING POINT

A starting point more suited to your race. You will be dropped into a hunting ground.

You're already crazy enough to experience the life of a monster, so this location is recommended for you.

Hmm, there would be pandemonium if a zombie started out in the middle of town—mainly because of my Decomposing Body and all the people who chose to start as beastmen. I don't want to stand out at all, so I'll go with my racial starting point. Also: I am definitely not *crazy*. I'm just curious, is all.

You have selected your racial starting point. This concludes character creation. Now connecting to the main server...

Ba-dump... Ba-dump...

In this world, your curiosity will unlock many doors. An unknown world, battles with unknown creatures, unknown skills, and a new life—let your desire to uncover the unknown guide you. And may your second life be a blessed one!

The changes come as soon as the system voice cuts off. A sprawling stone cityscape stretches out around me, while a warm wind strokes my skin...ah, not really. I hear nothing but the sluggish groans of my compatriots as they trudge about. My dark surroundings are blocked by dirt walls.

These are quite clearly the walls of a catacomb, thank you very much.

Chapter 2:

My Catacomb Home

AS YOU MIGHT HAVE NOTICED, I am stuck in a catacomb—and let me tell you, the visibility here is terrible. It's a bit murky, and there are holes in my field of vision. A side effect of Decomposing Body, perhaps?

For now, let's look at the menu. I get the feeling the unwanted contact blocker is pretty pointless in my zombified state, but I'll see what's on there anyway.

Mini-map on, of course. Overhead identifier? Yes, that should be on too. It looks like the unwanted contact blocker is on the bottom. Hmm, it's recommended to apply it to your face, torso, and legs above the knee. Meaning the area from my shoulders to my hands, my knees to my feet, and the back of my head can still be touched. That sounds about right.

There are only two options: limited contact and a friend list.

Limited: Remove the effects of the contact blocker for selected users on the friend list

Friend List: Do not apply contact blocker to any users on this list

****Note: Even if the unwanted contact blocker is not active, the system may punish certain actions based on its own judgment.***

Well then, the limited setting should be fine. I'll select Akina while I'm here. Next!

GORE SETTINGS:

All Ages/G: Wounds will be covered by a mysterious light.

R-15: Serious wounds and cross-sections will have a mosaic filter placed over

them.

R-18: Though models are slightly more cartoonish than reality, everything from blood to bones will be shown.

Oh, I see. It looks like you can select the color palette displayed for blood as well. That's thoughtful—there are people out there who faint at the sight of blood, after all. I think should be fine with R-15. With the All Ages setting on, the zombies around me are so clouded in light I can hardly make out what they are anymore. Oh, and the blood can stay red: I'm already used to seeing it IRL.

Secondary Voice Toggle: On/Off.

**** In the case of inhumans, their primary voice is monster sounds, and the secondary voice is the voice of the player.***

That *has* to stay on. Otherwise, I can't have a conversation with anyone. I make sure the "Lower primary voice when using secondary voice" option is checked.

Pain Transmission: 0 - 100 (Default value: 20)

****This is the level of pain you will feel when attacked.
The higher the number, the closer it will be to reality. Note: Users under 18 cannot set this value over 50.***

Well, that default is just fine. I don't feel particularly happy when I'm in pain; it's not really what I'm looking to get out of a game. Anyway, that should be about it for the settings. Next, let's check my inventory.

[EQUIPMENT-ARMOR] TATTERED RAGS

Rarity: None Quality: F Durability: —

The tattered remains of what used to be clothing. They're quite dirty and belong in the trash.

[EQUIPMENT-ARMOR] TATTERED SHOES

Rarity: None Quality: F Durability: —

The tattered remains of what used to be shoes. They're quite dirty and belong in the trash.

[RECOVERY] BEGINNER'S HP POTION

Rarity: None Quality: C

A magic medicine that restores 50HP.

Note: Cannot be used on the undead.

[RECOVERY] BEGINNER'S MP POTION

Rarity: None Quality: C

A magic medicine that restores 50MP.

Note: Cannot be used on the undead.

[RECOVERY] BEGINNER'S FIELD RATIONS

Rarity: None Quality: C

A compact field ration that relieves hunger by 10%.

The red phrase 'Note: Cannot be used on the undead' under those descriptions is quite a sad thing for me to read. I have my Regen skill, so I might be fine on HP, but I have zero MP. I'm pretty sure I don't need food either. I can eat, but the undead have no hunger system, so it's pointless to feed myself anyway.

As for that flickering envelope...Oh, that's my bonus money and potions from the limited edition! I can't use them, so I don't see any reason to redeem it. Well, not now at least, especially since I found out you lose half of your money when you die.

All right, that should be everything, so let's begin! First, I should explore my

new home and fill out the map. That's the first fundamental step of every RPG.

For starters...

ZOMBIE LV 6

A revived, rotting corpse. They flock around whomever they see.

Now that I get a better look at you guys...dang, you're pretty strong. All of you are, actually. Even the lowest level enemy in my home seems to be five levels higher than me. The strongest is level 9! Why am I the only level 1 unit here... oh. It's because I'm an undead newborn and because this is a game.

That aside, they're not attacking me. I think I read something about inhuman players not aggro-ing members of the same race. It's quite convenient, so I'll use this chance to map out the place.

I squirm out of my cavity in the wall—it could practically be my bed—and immediately find it incredibly hard to move. Something feels off. It's like my legs aren't the same length, and neither are working properly. Yes, just like that feeling when you're walking when one foot is numb but just short of tingly—but it's like that on both feet. Honestly, I'm about to fall over.



“Ah...!”

Squelch!

My head smacks into another zombie. Ugh, gotta get back on my feet. Goodness, this is quite a troublesome body. I can already see why this race was so unpopular.

Squelch!!

Huh? Did that zombie just smack me? There are red markers popping up around it. Oh no, don't tell me it will start attacking if I run into it? *Ow!* No, my sense of pain is kinda vague as an undead, so it doesn't exactly hurt, but it's not comfortable either.

I swing an arm out at the zombie's leg, and it easily tumbles over. It's got terrible balance, after all. I can understand its struggles, but I have no mercy. I know the power of a zombie down to my very undead soul!

Squelch!!

How should I put this? It's kind of like ground meat; like the feeling of pounding ground beef into hamburger patties. I crawl atop the zombie and begin to sluggishly flail my fists—trust me, it's not like I have any better options.

Apparently, equipment and skills are more important than your level in this game. There isn't even a stat screen, and the HP bar doesn't have any numerical values on it. While leveling up your race does raise your overall abilities, the stat bonuses from equipment and skills are simply superior, and it is possible to unlock new skills through special actions.

If you want to raise your strength, your best bet is to work on a skill that requires raw physical power. According to the official announcement, it's also possible to raise it through weight training, but raising stats through repetition was like trying to turn a mountain into dust: so inefficient it might as well be impossible.

As I continue my barrage, the zombie's health bar changes from green to yellow, then yellow to red, until finally it's gone entirely. Then the creature dissipates into wisps of light. It turns out you can defeat a zombie without

taking a point of damage, as long as you get on top of them.

Your Race Level has increased!

For the time being, I know how to defeat a zombie, so let's pick up a skill. Hmm, right, I believe I saw it on the initial skill list. I open the menu, go to skills, and skim over the ones I can learn. It looks like this window displays every single skill I'm eligible for. Inhumans can pick up monster skills here as well, though they're on a separate tab.

Monster skills for your species unlock as you increase your racial level. If you attack a monster of another race that has a skill, there's apparently a low chance of unlocking their skill as well. But...you still have to pay for them. Monster skills from your own race cost less, and the worse the affinity, the more points it will take to learn the skill.

Not that it matters to me.

I open the initial skill tab and naturally pick up the Fist skill. I'm not going to find a weapon in my current state, am I? Rather, judging by the sensation of swinging my arms, I get the feeling I won't be able to wield one anyway. Let's pray I can fix my build later.

Now, on with the search. Did I get any drops?

[INGREDIENT] ROTTEN MEAT

Rarity: NO Quality: F

A chunk of fetid, rotten meat.

...Yes.

Yes I did.

Even if it's rotten, meat is still meat, so let's just gloss over the fact that it's treated as an *edible* ingredient.

I swiftly forget about the rotten meat and begin lurching down every corner of the catacombs to fill in the map. My fears are soon realized—there is a horrible lack of anything noteworthy. Now and then, I accidentally trip and fall into a zombie, but I can defeat them and level up, so that’s fine.

Just as I calculate how long it might take to fill in the first floor, a call comes in from my sister.

“Hey, Sis, where you at?”

“Your elder sister is in the catacombs.”

“Cata—*whats*? Huh? Don’t tell me...”

“Let’s meet after I get rid of Decaying Body, okay?”

“You chose *zombie* of all things?! I thought you’d at least go for a skeleton or something. And you’re at the racial starting point too. That’s probably the right place for a zombie to be though...”

“Well, I thought there’d already be a few people playing the bony ones.”

“There are, but there are hardly any inhuman players in general. Well, there aren’t many players yet in FLFO in the first place.”

“I like playing quietly alone, so I decided to try out the most unpopular option.”

“I heard it’s hellish. Are you all right?”

“I’m already level 4. It’s easier than I thought!”

“Huh? Isn’t that too fast? I know inhumans are supposed to grow fast, but this is...”

“It’s because everyone around me is at least level 6. And they’re zombies, so they’re pretty easy to take down.”

“Yeah, but the looks, the feeling, the *stench*...! Ugh, with everything put together, I wouldn’t call it a *nice* place to level up in.”

“Admittedly, it’s kind of hard to walk. I can’t see properly either. I don’t think I can handle a weapon—rather, I haven’t gotten one yet. I’m whacking them with my bare hands, but it feels like slapping hamburger meat. This conversation is

getting through fine, but my hearing is also faint. It's like I've become an old woman."

"Wah— Oh wait! What about your tits, Sis?"

"They rotted off."

"N-no...! Th-that *can't* be...!!!"

Even though I can't see her, I can generally tell what sort of face she's making—a grimace, most likely. But even if I had breasts, the very fact that I'm a zombie would mean she can't glomp me like she usually does...

"Well, let's just pray that my magnificent mountains come back after I evolve and get rid of Decomposing Body."

"Urgh, call me if you hit a wall. I'll help out. Heck, I'll grind like crazy for you, Sis!"

"Yeah, yeah, I'll tell you all about my situation when we meet IRL."

"That's a promise!"

"If it felt impossible, I planned on deleting the character and starting over, but it still seems doable for now."

"For the time being, it looks like you're a higher level than me. I'll get hunting!"

"Good luck!"

"Let's do this!"

The conversation's over, so now I can concentrate on walking again—if I don't I'll have another collision. Still, this place really is wonderfully empty. Truly, splendidly *empty*. It's just a shame that defeating zombies only ever gets me rotten meat.

I log out, eat dinner, and log right back in. A while later, I've just about finished my map of the first floor—but the clock says it's nearly midnight. It's far past my bedtime. As is, I'm slow, and it's painful to walk, so mapping the catacombs is taking a lot longer than expected.

I know where the stairs down are, so I'll try heading to the second floor

tomorrow. I'm also curious about the level of the enemies there. I crawl into the same wall cavity I was born in and log out. While I'm at it, I set an alarm to remind me of bedtime next time I'm logged in.

I clean up the VR setup, go to the bathroom, stretch, and lie down on the bed again. How refreshing it is to use my own body again.

Good night.

Chapter 3:

Searching the Catacombs

“HOW ARE YOU holding up, Sis?” Akina suddenly asked over breakfast.

For a moment, I thought she was talking about my health, but then I realized Akina had to be talking about FLFO. Should I play dumb? No, that seems pretty pointless, all things considered.

“I’m holding up fairly well, for what it’s worth. Occasionally taking down an enemy or two while filling out the map.”

“So you’re mapping the place?”

“Yeah, I don’t think I’ll be coming back, so I’d better get it done with while I can.”

“And by the sound of things, evolving into a high zombie won’t make the job any easier, huh...”

“Mmm. Once I’m done eating, I plan on tackling the second level of the place.”

“Oh, so it’s not just one floor?”

“I saw a flight of stairs leading down into the depths. Based on what the enemies are like, I might have an easy time leveling up.”

“Right, those of the same race only go aggro if you attack first. Usually, undead-type monsters are troublesome because they swarm you with numbers...”

Generally speaking, I was taking them on one at a time, and I always got a preemptive strike. Hunting zombies is becoming incredibly easy. The undead are creepy, filthy, and putrid—not to mention their drops are pure *trash*. However, the experience points—or EXP—isn’t bad, so parties with area of effect, or AOE, capabilities sometimes go after them.

Indeed, the EXP was the only thing good about them. Those parties would

mow them down with fire and light magic and thus fail to raise any of their other skill levels. As the drops were literal stinking garbage, there was absolutely no money to be found. Honestly, zombies were not in high demand.

“Seeing as I can’t move properly at the moment, they’re actually quite convenient to my progress.”

“I’d say that’s mainly because you always get the first strike.”

“For now, I’ll spend today...ah, rather, I’ll have to spend the next few days mapping.”

“Huh? Was the place always that big?”

“It’s decently big, but I’m slow, and I trip now and then. Let me tell you, it’s super hard to get around. I’m hoping I can finish today, but I might find a third floor after that. You never know.”

“Ah...”

“Now let’s do this.”

“Yeah!”

After washing the dishes, I head to my room and immediately log into FLFO.

Hello again, my dear, sweet catacombs! I crawl out and promptly start down the stairs—nearly tripping over myself from my own impatience.

Right into my first encounter with a high zombie.

HIGH ZOMBIE LV 15

A rotten, reanimated corpse. They flock around whoever they see.

Yeaaaaah, now I get it. Looks like the high zombies range from level 15 to level 19. Visually...well, I honestly can’t tell the difference between them and normal zombies. Did anything change at all? I guess they’re walking a bit better—but I could just be seeing things.

I'd better not pin any hopes on my future evolution.

After spending the entirety of my Sunday mapping out the second floor, I stumbled upon the stairs down to basement floor three. I didn't even manage to completely map out floor two. That is all. I'm going to bed a bit upset.

Come to think of it, does the game not treat the catacombs as a dungeon, ancient ruins, or anything? The sheer emptiness of the halls is quite disheartening. Seeing as it's the starting point for zombie players, there's a high chance I won't find anything at all. But now that I've gotten this far, I simply *have* to map the whole place out.

I'm back at it the next day as soon as I get home from school. At school, I chatted a bit about FLFO with two boys I've known from kindergarten, but it will be some time before I can meet them in-game. Once my mapping is done, I'll prioritize leveling up and evolving. Akina's waiting for me, and I'll need to get rid of Decomposing Body before I do anything else.

Now, what are the enemies like on floor three...? I'm not done with floor two, but let's check since I'm here anyway.

LIVING DEAD LV 27

An undead, living corpse. They flock around whoever they see.

They're around level 27 to 29 down here. Perhaps I can hunt here for a while? They seem to go up around ten levels with each floor, which would usually be quite a jump. Even if raising levels doesn't influence things as much as raising skills, ten levels is quite a difference. Some enemies also come with higher skill levels when their base level increases.

Another thing of note—it looks like the next evolution after high zombie is living dead. I'm assuming that evolution takes place around level 20. I haven't focused on hunting just yet, so I'm not even level 10.

Name: Anastasia

Race: Zombie ♀ Lv 5

Attribute: Dark

Genus: Low Undead

Species: Zombie

Skill points: 4

SKILLS:

Fist Lv 4, Strength Boost Lv 3, Endurance Boost Lv 2, Appraisal Lv 1

RACE (MONSTER) SKILLS:

Physical Resistance Lv 1, Automatic HP Regen Lv 1, Low Undead, Decomposing Body

Yep, I've still got a looong way to go. Punching is the only thing I've done to raise my skill level. My enemies topple over on their own, so I just have to crawl on top of them and start smacking away. I haven't had a proper battle yet.

The problem is that they also have Automatic HP Regen, so it takes quite a bit of time to defeat them. My Endurance Boost went up on its own. I guess I gain experience in it if I walk, fight, and move my body. Physical Resistance and Automatic HP Regen are defensive skills, so they're not going up. They might both increase if I get hit, but I don't think that's going to happen with zombies. I'll be better off training those skills elsewhere.

I'd probably die if I went at the living dead head-on. They clearly move a lot more nimbly than my other undead kin. Their description changed from rotting corpse to simply "corpse." Although they're still a bit stilted, they seem far better off than zombies and even high zombies. I'm dubious whether or not I can beat them with the same tactics, so I should be careful with them.

Now let's go back and explore floor two! Not that there's anything there...

Monday—no results. Exploration rate: The second floor remains incomplete.

Tuesday—I finished the second floor. Yay!

Wednesday—entering the third floor. Catacombs exploration rate: 20 percent.

Thursday—absolute *tragedy*. Tripped into a living dead and was smacked to death. Going to sleep angry.

Friday—no results. Catacombs exploration rate: 50 percent.

Saturday—it's been a week since I started aaand...no results. Just a little more to fill out the map.

Aaand now for Sunday. Let's hope I can finish today.

It looks like I'm 100 percent dead if I trip and fall into the living dead, so I need to lower my already slow pace to downright sluggish. There's a penalty if you die, and I hardly have anything as it is. All I'm really doing is being more watchful when I walk, but because I can't even move properly, it makes me needlessly anxious. Would it be a load off my mind if I evolved first and got better legs?

I've already gone beyond the point where I can level—and high zombies don't look much better.

It will be summer vacation soon. During the exam period, I can be back home by noon, and I'm sure I'll be better off if I get all the troublesome mapping out of the way first. Once I evolve and get rid of Decomposing Body, I'll probably be able to go outside. And once I leave, there's no telling when I'll be back here.

Just a little more exploration and I should finish. Watch your step, watch your step...huh. Perhaps I've gotten better at walking as a zombie. And the last bit is...a dead end. This means...yes! I've fully mapped this place! There's no fourth floor.

I check over the maps of floors one to three. There aren't any strange cutoffs, so I think I've gone through everything and found absolutely nothing.

Hmm? Am I just imagining it? Err, wait a sec. Let's open each map in a different window.

Size-wise, the first floor is the smallest, the second floor the largest, and floor three is somewhere in between. I don't see anything wrong with the first floor, but there's a rather curious area on floor two. As a catacomb, every square inch should be crammed with corridors. That's generally how it is with the third floor. But there's this peculiar blank space on the second floor map...perhaps I should check it out. There could be a hidden room!

I've walked along the adjoining wall and didn't find anything. But now that I'm taking a better look at it, this area in particular is a bit luxurious. Perhaps it's a place for the dead with a bit of money to spare?

On the first floor, this area is just a normal walkway. On the third, it's off the map. I see, I see. Could there be an open atrium running from the third floor to the second? If the entrance is on the third floor, that means the only path it could join with would be here. I know I can't find anything on the second floor, and if it's an atrium, that means it will be a long way down. I can definitely see these decorations camouflaging something.

All right, I'll give it a shot—and if this doesn't work, I'll focus on leveling.

Yes, this has to be the passageway. If I find something, that means it was worth it to fill out the map after all! I stick close to the wall, but it's just a dead end. There doesn't seem to be anything on the surface.

Now, checking both sides...

"Hmm...?"

I find a spot with a bit of give I can press. Putting a little strength behind it, I keep pressing until it feels like something falls into place. But *where*?

I nervously look around and notice that the dead-end wall has tilted a bit. My sense of hearing is essentially nonexistent, so there's a good chance I simply didn't hear it moving. The surrounding living dead are also pretty loud. In any case, I immediately head over and give the shifted wall a push—it seems like a hidden door. I keep pressing and pushing until the wall has done a complete 180 degree turn and has closed again as though it were once again a dead end

—but with me on the other side.

Inside, the ceiling is incredibly high, and the room is quite vast. It looks like that space on the second floor really was an atrium.

Unlike outside, the ornamentation is beautiful...ah, scratch that, maybe not. Although the decorations are lavish, they haven't been maintained. Long story short, they're filthy. This is what I imagine a VIP's grave would be like if it was abandoned without a care.

As I head from the entrance to the center, something long and thin suddenly lifts into the air in the distance. Is that a sword...? My moment of pondering is cut short as it suddenly zips through the air and pierces my chest.

By the time I realize it, I'm staring at a familiar ceiling in the real world. This is absurd—the undead should have instant death resistance. That means I must have died from the raw damage? Usually, I'd be locked out for a while before I could revive, but it looks like I can log in right away. Which means that was a scripted event? All right, let's head back in.

I clamber my way back down to the third floor and stick to the wall until I find the button again. It should be right around here. Its location hasn't changed... probably. I don't really remember the first time, so I can't say for sure. I enter through the revolving wall.

Now what? The sword doesn't come at me until I move from the entrance, so is there anything noteworthy? There, at the back of the room—that looks like a door. That's probably my destination. Now what to do about the sword? Seriously, like, what do I do?

Are there any hints...?

Hmm, nothing catches my eyes, although my terrible vision makes it difficult to search. But this is a grave, which probably means that thing in the center is a gravestone. I think that's where the sword came from, meaning I can't get any closer to it without being insta-killed. It's impossible to dodge with a zombie's body. It was slow when it started floating, but it was fast when it aimed at me.

With the next step, I'm pierced through again. I die, head to the hidden room, die again, and head back. This is how you brute force a game—or maybe how a

zombie brute forces it. You know what? Let's take a lunch break. Mulder, I'm too tired.

Mom's not home today, so I guess I have to do the cooking. Would omurice be all right? Looks like we have eggs. As for meat, well, pork belly should do. I'll just have to cut it a bit thin. Oh, we don't have enough ketchup. Then let's make it butter rice instead!

My sister comes down just as I'm almost finished cooking.

"Something smell's good! What's for lunch, Koto?"

"We're having butter omurice!"

"Whoa, nice."

"It'll be out soon, just wait."

"Okaaay."

I transfer two servings of rice to the plates, then whisk together two portions of eggs, pour half into the pan, fry it, and put the finished omelet on one of the plates. Then I pour in the second half into the pan and finish up the second serving.

"All done, Akina."

"Sweet! Ketchup—ah, we're almost out."

"That's why it's butter rice instead."

The two of us chow down as we talk about the game.

"Right now, the hunting team's doing their best against the boss to unlock the next town. But they're low on healing items."

"The game limits the distribution of goods, right?"

"That's right. It's a real hassle when consumables are out of stock."

"You need Compounding to make potions, right?"

"Yeah, Compounding or Alchemy. But Alchemy only makes goods at a fixed level, and Compounding is pretty annoying."

"What's annoying about it? Low profits, or a lack of materials to use?"

“Both, I hear. Also, it takes a lot of time to make them. The skill level is too low for our current player base, so they can’t make anything decent either.”

“It sounds like you’re talking about a completely different game from what I’m playing.”

“Well, you chose to be a zombie. Ah, by the way, how are things going?”

“After filling out the map, I found a hidden room, but there was an instant-death trap gimmick. I’m brute forcing it to see if there’s any way to get through.”

“Ooooooh, secret room!”

“Unlike the other places, it looks like it’s a grave for someone important. Pretty big and luxurious too. There seems to be a gravestone in the middle.”

“Hmm! What sort of trap is it?”

“The sort that attacks if I’m in range. I can see a door in the back, so I want to get through somehow. But I die instantly if the trap springs and the sword hits me.”

“Undead are immune to instant death, aren’t they? They should have quite a bit of stamina too, but you still die in one hit. Weird.”

“I’m going to challenge it again after this. I’ll try to find a way around.”

“Do your best to get there before someone else finds it!”

“I haven’t even *seen* anyone else yet...”

“Well, you’re a zombie! So, like, why are you even putting yourself through all this, Sis?”

“Ha ha ha, my instincts are telling me to do it.”

“Then go for it, I guess.”

Akina says she’ll do the dishes this time, so I head for the catacombs as soon as I’ve finished eating.

Now it’s time for rematch with the hidden room. I head left as soon as I’m through the entrance, sticking fast against the wall as I lurch forward. Before lunch, I figured out that the sword returns to its resting place if you leave the

range before it stabs you. So I need to know its full range.

I inch forward: No reaction from the sword yet. Maybe this is the right answer. The moment the sword starts floating, I immediately stop and press myself back against the wall. I'm prepared to go bowlegged if I have to. As soon as I stop and move out of range, the sword goes back where it came from. Maybe I should be thankful that my chest rotted away. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to stay *completely* out of range.

In fact, there's a high chance this would have been impossible if I evolved and my breasts came back. With a flat chest and determination, I can do this!

Err, not exactly. I promptly find myself impaled again. *Why?!*

I was fine up to a certain point. Presumably, the safe zone somehow changed. Am I really supposed to solve this without any hints? Seriously?

Well, that's not going to stop me.

Don't think you can stop me forever, you potentially rare item you! Not that I even know if there're any potential rare items to be found.

I set my pain transmission to zero. I'm working under the premise that I'm going to die again and again. Up to a certain point, I slink along the wall. Then I part from it, crouching down, holding out my hand as I observe the sword. If it starts floating, I quickly pull it back, then stick it out elsewhere. Repeat ad nauseum, et cetera, et cetera.

What about my legs? If I use my legs, I'll trip. And then it's over for me. I get stabbed.

Through endless repetition, I gradually grow closer and closer to the door. This is one of those games, the ones where you're meant to die again and again. This isn't the advertised genre for FLFO, but the catacombs don't seem to offer any hints. I should be thankful the sword goes back at all when I back off. Now I don't just up and die the moment it comes out.

I keep at it, taking breaks every few deaths. Learning from dying is, in essence, a test of patience. Now and then, my sister's words come back to me. "Why are

you even putting yourself through all this?” Must just be my overactive imagination.

It takes a few hours, but I’m finally in front of the door. I don’t make any unnecessary moves once I’m there, heading straight for my destination. The hinges swing open, and I practically collapse onto the ground beyond it.

I made it!

The room is a bit cramped due to the coffin at the very center. A brief glance around the room heralds nothing else of note. I try rummaging around and come up empty-handed. How tragic after all my deaths. In any case, I’m just grateful that the coffin didn’t burst open when I first got close.

In any case, this coffin must be what I’m after. The moment my hand brushes up against the lid as I attempt to open it, I’m suddenly stripped of my bodily autonomy. My hands move on their own and crack it open. The system is controlling me... Is this a scripted event?

I watch it transpire—as if I have any choice.

Beneath the slanted lid is a mummy of what was once presumably a woman. Rather, I know it was a woman, because that’s what my Appraisal skill is telling me. The Princess Mummy, to be more precise.

Under the system’s control, my hand heads straight to the mummy’s chest and rends its way straight through her rib cage with a terrible cracking sound. It firmly clutches something as it snakes its way out.

[EVENT] ROYAL FLESH

Rarity: EX

The divine flesh and blood of royalty.

A key item to unlock an extra race.

Official BBS 1

[Boss] Comprehensive Thread 7 [Too Strong]

1. Passing Conqueror

This thread is for organizing information about the bosses.

Put down any information you can.

Past threads: <http://> * * * * *

>> 980 Continue this discussion in the next thread

592. Passing Conqueror

We don't have enough potions! Also, the bosses are friggin' strong!

593. Passing Conqueror

>> 592 Way too strong. The VR still makes it pretty fun.

594. Passing Conqueror

>> 593 Yeah, it's hella fun. But it takes a lot of nerve to engage those things at close quarters.

595. Passing Conqueror

>> 594 Hats off to those gutsy tanks, then.

596. Passing Conqueror

>> 595 Cheers!!!

597. Passing Conqueror

It's terrifying to face a golem head-on...then a dragon to top it all off. Good

luck, tanks.

598. Passing Conqueror

Good luck, tanks

599. Passing Conqueror

That aside, potions—rather, consumables in general—are a problem. We might have to head west.

600. Passing Conqueror

>> 599 Yeah, the shortage is getting pretty bad.

Anything but west though...

601. Passing Conqueror

>> 600 Bug-type monsters are just the worst in VR.

They're a bit cartoonish but still just as disgusting! Ew ew ew!

602. Passing Conqueror

>> 601 and did you see the size of those things? I get goosebumps just thinking about it. I'd rather charge headlong at a boss!

603. Passing Conqueror

I don't care where we go, I just want one of those bosses to go down.

604. Passing Conqueror

Yeah, we haven't defeated any of them yet.

605. Passing Conqueror

If we don't defeat that northern golem, we won't be able to mine ore...

606. Passing Conqueror

We're in the same boat here. From what I've gathered, it's north for ore, east for agriculture, west for herbs, and south for the port.

607. Passing Conqueror

>> 606 Yep, so I guess north and west are the top priority if we want armor and consumables.

608. Passing Conqueror

To be perfectly honest, the western boss isn't that strong, it's just its appearance that's unbearable. Seriously.

609. Passing Conqueror

I thought the plan was to defeat the golem with magic so we'd have the materials to make equipment to beat the others...

610. Passing Conqueror

Yeah, well, the golem's too strong.

611. Passing Conqueror

Indeed, the golem is strong. It's a boss, doing boss things like a boss does.

612. Passing Conqueror

I'm thinking of challenging the golem. Anything I should look out for?

613. Passing Conqueror

Have fun dodging its stomps

614. Passing Conqueror

>> 613 I know. Jumping as a party is fun.

615. Passing Conqueror

>> 614 It's a mess when you mess up the timing, though.

616 Passing Conqueror

>> 613 The stomps are when it lifts its arms and slams the ground, right?

617. Passing Conqueror

>> 616 Yeah, that's right. A shock wave spreads out from the impact point, so you have to jump over it. Especially look out for your back line. Based on their build, it could one-shot them.

618. Passing Conqueror

>> 617 Wait, that attack is that strong?

619. Passing Conqueror

>> 618 I've seen it first-hand. It's probably because of how obviously telegraphed it is. You get sent flying even if you don't die, so dodging is your only option.

620. Passing Conqueror

>> 619 The golem only stomps and spin punches. It's got nothing special. The problem is that it speeds up in the second phase.

621. Passing Conqueror

>> 620 It starts feinting sometimes too. That's pretty harsh on the front line. If it circles around to the back line, those spin punches can deal massive damage.

622. Passing Conqueror

>> 621 Got it, I'll be careful! Wish me luck!

623. Passing Conqueror

>> 622 Godspeed.

**[Environmental Destruction] Comprehensive Production Chat Thread 8
[Necessary Sacrifices]**

1. Nameless Crafter

This is a thread to discuss production.
Please talk about production here. Also check the boards for each skill.
Past threads: [http:// * * * * *](#)
Smithing: [http:// * * * * *](#)
Carpentry: [http:// * * * * *](#)
Needlework: [http:// * * * * *](#)
... *etc.*

>> 980 Continue this discussion in the next thread

345. Nameless Crafter

There are no materiaaaaaaals!!!!!!

346. Nameless Crafter

There really is nothing. Nothing new, at least...

347. Nameless Crafter

Do we just have to wait until they beat a boss?

348. Nameless Crafter

Right. I hope somewhere opens up soon.

349. Nameless Crafter

North is for smithing, east for farming, west for compounding, south for carpentry, right?

350. Nameless Crafter

>> 349 Yeah, you've got it right. We can probably unlock fishing if we head south too. Maybe even shipbuilding...?

351. Nameless Crafter

>> 350 Shipbuilding, eh... You think we could set up a fish hatchery?

352. Nameless Crafter

>> 350-351 Only if there are ships, and they let us head out to sea. Though with this game, you never know...

353. Nameless Crafter

>> 352 Can you even make a ship on your own...? It would also cost a pretty penny to repair and maintain it.

354. Nameless Crafter

Well, in the end, we just have to wait for someone to defeat a boss. Or else...

355. Nameless Crafter

Right, but when I popped in, they were complaining about not having enough potions.

356. Nameless Crafter

Compounding takes time. They don't heal as much if you just throw them together. And the west just had to be full of BUGS.

357. Nameless Crafter

I wouldn't go there if you forced me. Thankfully, you don't have to head west if all you want is an HP potion.

358. Nameless Crafter

Won't we have more trade if the port opens?

359. Nameless Crafter

I can definitely see that happening.

360. Nameless Crafter

Okay, so if compounding's no good, how about using alchemy?

361. Nameless Crafter

Alchemy. Yeah, about that...

362. Nameless Crafter

It's good for mass production, but it blows through all your mana just to make a few of them. Pretty harsh returns.

363. Nameless Crafter

How should I put it? It's really magical how you can make them instantly, but you can't really beat the specialists. Like, sure, you have the goods, but they've got no individuality.

364. Nameless Crafter

Honestly, it just feels lacking to anyone who loves crafting.

365. Nameless Crafter

It's not like they have a high output anyway. I guess alchemy would be good for the diligent folks who can gather all sorts of materials on their own. The items they make are fixed quality, so it feels like a waste to invest in the materials.

366. Nameless Crafter

Yeah, I guess the benefit is that NPCs can buy them off of you so...profit?

367. Nameless Crafter

You might make a profit—*maybe*. It's pretty hard to mass-produce C-grade potions through compounding, in any case.

368. Nameless Crafter

The quality starts low, but you expect it to rise if you raise your level...only to find out it stops at C...

369. Nameless Crafter

>> 368 Owwwww, my head...

370. Nameless Crafter

>> 368 Don't say it. Just, shut up...

371. Nameless Crafter

>> 368 I think it's good that you can select the quality of the items you want to make...but is there really any point in selecting anything under C?

372. Nameless Crafter

There are a few people I'd recommend alchemy to, like archers and farmers...

373. Nameless Crafter

Right, for arrows and fertilizer.

374. Nameless Crafter

>> 373 Right, right. It's convenient when you can make those on your own. The manure aside, arrows cost wood, though...

375. Nameless Crafter

But alchemy itself just doesn't feel good enough.

376. Nameless Crafter

>> 375 You can say that again.

Chapter 4:

Evolution

OH HO? I probably just found something pretty dang nice. Was it worth the effort? No, wait, what is my hand doing? Where are you taking that lump of flesh... I really don't think that's edible. I really, *really* don't, but it's not stopping. Ah, my sense of taste is completely dead. It doesn't really taste like anything.

Before me, the Princess Mummy crumbles to dust.

Ingesting Royal Flesh has added new potential races for evolution.

Sounds lovely, but I can't evolve yet. For now, I have no further business in this room, so I'll just leave. The coffin's empty. And it seems I regained control with that announcement.

After leaving the room, I wonder what to do about the sword. In my muddled field of view, the darn sword was there again, flying straight at me.

Oof... Back to my familiar ceiling. Yes, I've been impaled. It didn't hurt, but it might as well have for all the grief it's causing me. But it would have been quite a pain to skulk my way out of that room, and nigh impossible to defeat the living dead down there, so maybe it's for the best. I'll just hunt zombies around my respawn point.

The sword was merciless even after I ate the Royal Flesh. Maybe I should try heading to that room again after I've finalized my evolution. I'm still only level 6, but I'm more than strong enough to take on my brethren. Let's just take out every last one of them! Sure, I got some stat penalties from dying so many times, but that hardly matters when you're a zombie. I barely have stats to begin with.

My hunting method is quite simple. When a zombie walks toward me, I step

to one side and concede the path. Then, as it passes, I swing my arm with all my might at the back of its head. The zombie smacks face-first into the ground, and while it's down, I crawl over it and shower it with a barrage of punches. That's all it takes to beat a zombie.

A hit to the back of the head, a punch to the face, and then just endless smacks until it's dead. The zombie AI isn't smart enough to do anything about it. Sure, they have Physical Resistance, but it's not Physical Immunity—I just have to hit them faster than they can recover with Auto HP Regen.

I don't have any MP, so I can't use magic. Smacking them really is my only option. Incidentally, this method works on floor two's high zombies as well—it just takes way too long. It should be quicker to work on clearing out the first floor until I get to level 10.

Now let's get to the slaughter!

Your efforts have unlocked the Sneak Attack skill.

Your Race Level has increased!

You have reached Race Level 10. Racial Evolution is possible!

Killing zombies is honestly a lot of busywork, but it's quite a bit easier on my mind; that sword was too stressful to deal with. I unlocked the Sneak Attack skill along the way, but I'm ignoring it for now.

I'll evolve and have dinner. Hmm, if I want to evolve...ah! Must be that eye-catching pop-up over there. It keeps flashing in the corner of my eye.

PLEASE SELECT YOUR EVOLUTION

- ***High Zombie***
- ***Corpse Princess (Ex Race)***

I can roughly guess the nature of my evolution options from their names, but

what exactly are extra races? Help me out here, UI...extra race—oh, it's been added to the help menu.

****Extra races are special unlockable races or sudden mutations. These are otherwise known as “unique monsters.” There are various conditions required to unlock them, such as reaching specific stat levels or possessing certain skills. Some races require a key item, and in some cases, only one of this item exists on the server.***

The first person to achieve a certain extra race will receive slightly different abilities. Additionally, there are races which only one person can obtain. Please note that there are certain races the dev team got a little carried away with. We hope they amuse you.

I see. The Princess Mummy did vaporize, so I might have gotten a drop that's limited to only one player who got the key item. The title of “royalty” would certainly be pointless if there were royals all over the place. It's also not strange for royalty to try to leave their blood behind.

Let's just ignore the minor details for now.

This choice might as well not exist. Naturally, I'm going to choose the extra race—but I might as well look over both.

HIGH ZOMBIE

An evolved zombie. Though they boast increased strength and endurance, they are basically the same as their lesser zombie kin.

CORPSE PRINCESS

A zombie that evolved after devouring the flesh and blood of royalty. Though they are classified as high undead, they are currently nothing more than a decaying, rotting corpse.

A high zombie seems to be a straightforward stronger version of the basic zombie, as expected. The princess, meanwhile, is a high undead. And don't think I didn't notice that word "currently" at the end: Is that telling me to do my best and evolve further? Well then, there really isn't much of a decision to be made here.

You have chosen the Extra Race "Corpse Princess." You will be temporarily unable to act while the evolution is in progress. Would you like to begin evolving?

Ah, wait, let me go back to my bed. I lurch back to my respawn point and make the final selection.

Beginning the evolution of Low Undead Zombie to High Undead Corpse Princess.

My character closes its eyes without my input, and I'm wrapped in a deep, pitch-dark blackness. All I can see is the game's UI. A text log floats across the screen.

Your body is being recreated with Royal Flesh.

Wait, I'm being remade? It's not going to take over, is it? Is this really all right?

YOUR RACE SKILLS HAVE BEEN UPDATED...

Low Undead has changed to High Undead

ADDING NEW RACE SKILLS...

Acquired Physical Immunity

Acquired Dark Aura

Acquired Undying Royalty

Evolution...complete!

Due to your low Race Level, you are unable to exhibit your true strength. Restrictions have been placed on your character at this time.

Looks like the evolution is done. I have the same Decaying Body, so I'm still pretty dead. That aside, let's review my new skills. Since I didn't get a full character rebuild screen, I guess that means my stats didn't change by that much. Those temporary restrictions probably have to do with me suddenly achieving high undead status—a balancing mechanic. There's not much I can do about that. But let's see what's changed...

"Purification Resistance: Moderate" was added to my skills, and my other bonuses got changed from minor to major. It doesn't look like there's anything else. The restriction is probably nerfing my biggest bonuses, but it doesn't show up on the screen, so I don't know exactly how.

Purification resistance must be a resistance against a special anti-undead debuff that lowers all stats and my HP Regen rate. That's pretty useful. Ah, and my other new skill is...

PHYSICAL IMMUNITY

Completely nullifies damage from all physical skills with a skill level less than or equal to half of the user's skill level.

So if I raise my immunity to Lv 10, that means I won't take damage from any physical skills Lv 5 or below. On the other hand, I'll still take normal damage from anything above that, and that's where my resistance comes in. It's a skill that lets me completely ignore enemies below my class.

UNDYING ROYALTY

Boosts the abilities of undead in the party in accordance with skill level.

Reduces the damage received from undead enemies in accordance with skill level.

DARK AURA

Adds a chance to inflict poison, curse, or weaken on your enemies. The rate at which these ailments will be inflicted increases with skill level. The intensity of these status ailments will increase every 10 levels.

Current Intensity: 1 (Max 6)

Hmm. I don't have much to say about Undying Royalty. It is what it is. As for Dark Aura, that's probably the hazy black particle effect that's been emanating from my body for a while now.

HELP MENU—STATUS AILMENTS

ABOUT STATUS AILMENTS

A Status Ailment is an abnormal state displayed on characters and enemies. They include a wide variety of effects. Some ailments cannot be cured with a recovery item, so please be careful what you're inflicted with. Status ailments are generally classified as Physical, Mental, or Other.

ABOUT STATUS AILMENT INTENSITY

Ailments can have different levels of strength. The ailment's intensity level will be displayed next to the ailment name. The highest intensity level is usually 5.

The intensity level may rise if the same ailment is inflicted on you in succession. For example, if an enemy repeatedly inflicts Poison (1) on you, it will cause the toxins to accumulate and eventually raise it to Poison (2).

Higher intensity levels have different effects depending on the ailment. For poison, poison damage will be increased. For stun, the probability of being stunned by attacks will rise.

Letting your ailments increase in intensity can be incredibly dangerous. For your sake, please cure them as soon as possible.

I see. This means that if I raise the level of Dark Aura, it will not only increase my proc—that is, my programmed random occurrence—rate, it will also let me inflict high-intensity ailments from the start. What’s more, it has an extraordinary cap of 6. It’s a zombie-tree race skill, so I guess enemies will start having it mid-to late-game. Yes, I can see it becoming quite a pain to deal with—though I’m immune to status ailments, so that part has little to do with me.

In any case, does this mean I can stack poison, curse, and weaken all at once? It doesn’t look like I can select which one I want. This is definitely going to be one wicked skill.

All right, I finished going over my stats, so it’s time to break for dinner.

“It’s going to be a bit longer before I can go outside the catacombs,” I tell my sister before logging back in after dinner. I’m getting quite into it, although I still haven’t met a single person yet in what’s supposed to be an MMO. Like, one of those M’s *should* stand for multiplayer, right?

Now let’s get to leveling. My goal is to be free of Decaying Body seriously soon. After all, I do want to leave the catacombs one of these days. It’s been roughly a week since the game launched, and I’ve been living down there this whole time.

I promptly head to the second floor and start beating down a high zombie with the same strategy I used for the zombies, but...*huh?!*

This princess actually has a *functioning* body. My punches are stronger, and I’m quite a bit faster. Now let’s keep at it! Wait...on second thought, I should check back in on that sword. I’m fully evolved, after all.

If that sword was around to protect royalty, then how will it act once I've *become* royalty myself? Onward to the third floor!

I press the wall, reveal the passage, and head in. Here we go!

Oh...

Well, that was no good. Oof. There's that familiar ceiling again. Guess I'm back to hunting high zombies. But what about the sword? I'll think about it after Decaying Body goes away.

Come to think of it, now that I'm level 10, there's a chance that I'll spawn with missing parts. I can't just die thoughtlessly anymore—not that I'm dying for the heck of it.

As a high zombie tries to pass by, I smack it in the back of the head. It face-plants straight into the ground, then I climb on top of it and begin hammering away at its brain. This has to be going against some principle of game design. I mean, these enemies are supposed to be between levels 15 and 19.

But if you had a way to defeat enemies nine levels above you, you'd abuse it, wouldn't you?

Incidentally, not much has changed besides my damage output. Undying Royalty is pointless since I'm not in a party. Dark Aura does nothing against the undead. Granted, I'm defeating high zombies a lot quicker now, so I don't have many complaints.

Smack, mount, punch: a loop of endless EXP grinding. Only my Fist skill rises in level. The fact that I'm not fighting any proper battles means that I'm not raising any of my other skills, unfortunately. Though my slight rise in Physical Resistance must have to do with being stabbed so many times.

Still, with such a good grinding spot, is it really just the visuals that make being a zombie so unpopular? In any case, from what I can see, the catacombs only house zombies, high zombies, and living dead—none of which are too appealing. That much was known from the beta tests. Then where is my race headed from here on out...?

I think about that as I punch down another high zombie. But bedtime comes before I can evolve. I go to the bathroom, stretch, lie back down, and go to

sleep.

Chapter 5:

Evolution and Equipment

“HOW’S IT GOING, Sis?”

“I think I should be evolving soon.”

“Wow! What level are you?”

“I’m level 19.”

“Wh-wha?! Isn’t that a bit too fast? I guess that’s zombies for you. By the by, what’s the encounter table like?”

“The first floor has levels 6 to 9. The second has 15 to 19, and 27 to 29 on the third.”

“I didn’t know that enemies that level were available yet. You get bonus EXP for fighting enemies that are a higher level than yourself, so I think you got a good deal there...”

“Yeah, I can beat them without taking damage, after all.”

“Huh? *Seriously?*”

“Yep! I already got the pattern down.”

“Oh right, they don’t attack you unprovoked since you’re a zombie. If they’re not swarming you, they’re slow enough to take out one at a time. And if they’re higher level to boot...”

“I don’t know if I’ll evolve at 20, but I’m praying I can get rid of Decaying Body.”

“Come to think of it, you’ve been living in the catacombs for a whole week now.”

“Mmm, though I’d like to leave them. I’ve gotten quite sick of it, to be honest.”

“Just looking at your level, I bet you’re one of the top players!”

“Fist is the only skill I’ve raised. I don’t even know if a zombie can properly use any other skill.”

“Well, that’s one of the reasons they were so unpopular...”

“I’m pinning my hopes on level 20.”

Mom joined the conversation. “I’m glad you’re having fun, but aren’t your *exams* coming up?”

“Hmm, I’ll be fine probably...” Akina stammers evasively. It isn’t that she’s bad at studying, but I think she just has an instinctive negative reaction to the word “exam.”

“All right. And what about you, Kotone?”

“I’m perfectly fine.”

“That’s good to know. Well, it’s not like I’m too worried. I mean, Akina’s always gaming, but she somehow has perfect attendance.”

“Akina focuses hard on all her lessons *because* she wants to game at home. She doesn’t want any studying to get in the way.”

“Whatever her motive is, I don’t have much to say as long as she’s taking things seriously.”

“Ugh, summer break can’t come soon enough...” Akina groans.

As soon as school is out, I immediately log in. I expect my next evolution to be around level 20, but there’s a high chance it won’t be that simple for extra races. Not that there’s any use worrying about it—I’ll find out as soon as I level up. I’ll be there soon, my dear high zombies.

It takes roughly an hour of wailing on them until...

Your Race Level has increased.

You have reached Race Level 20. Racial Evolution is possible!

That self-assertive blinking evolution icon reappears in the corner of my field of view.

PLEASE CHOOSE YOUR EVOLUTION:

· ***Immortal Princess***

Oh ho, I've finally escaped from being a dead body?

IMMORTAL PRINCESS

The highest race among the undead. You will one day reign supreme over the undead masses...perhaps.

As royalty, this race excels in intelligence and spirit, with respectably high dexterity as well. It maintains the high endurance of an undead but is mired by incredibly low strength and agility.

Perhaps...? What's *that* supposed to mean? Hmm, never mind. Ah, it doesn't say anything about being dead or rotting, and it looks like my stats are going to jump up. This is promising. Let's get straight back to my respawn point and evolve.

Here we go!

EVOLVING FROM CORPSE PRINCESS TO IMMORTAL PRINCESS...

YOUR RACE SKILLS HAVE BEEN UPDATED...

Decaying Body has been removed.

Magia Trace has been added to High Undead

THE FOLLOWING RACE SKILLS HAVE BEEN ACQUIRED:

Magical Resistance

Royal Privilege

Racial Evolution complete. Your evolution has drastically changed your stat allocation. It is possible to rebuild. Due to your low Race Level, you are unable to exhibit your full strength. Restrictions have been placed on your character at this time.

Finally, Decaying Body is gone, and I can rebuild! I also got Magical Resistance. That's got to be the magic version of Physical Resistance.

MAGICAL RESISTANCE

Magical damage will be reduced based on the user's skill level.

ROYAL PRIVILEGE

Raises all stats of party members when you are the leader. The increase depends on the user's skill level and the party scope.

Is that something unique because I'm a princess now? I get the feeling Royal Privilege will be absolute trash if I don't level it up, but unlike Undying Royalty, it probably won't increase unless I'm in a party. Undying Royalty even rises when I'm beating up the undead—is it because I'm proving my strength to them or something?

I don't really know what it means by the phrase "party scope," but that can wait. Losing Decaying Body has cleared up my vision; or rather, it's returned it to normal from the terrible state it's been in so far. Before this change, it was like looking through dirty, cracked glass.

As for the Magia Trace that came with becoming high undead...

MAGIA TRACE

A magic “eye” that allows you to visualize magical energy. You can identify attributes by colored auras. These auras can appear lighter or darker depending on density.

I see—some sort of magic eye, huh. Now *that* I can get behind!

With my review over, I sit up, only to feel something off. The source of this unease—oh my! My hair and breasts are back in their proper places. Welcome home, old friends!

Yes, my body is essentially that of a normal human, if you exclude the dark haze that’s a by-product of Dark Aura. Mind you, Dark Aura is a passive skill that I can toggle on and off. Hmm, if I turn it off, won’t it be impossible to tell my true nature by sight alone? Either way, I’m happy I have a proper human body, but there is one thing I’m not happy about. I’m talking about the equipment I never even stopped to consider.

I mean, just look at my starting gear.

[EQUIPMENT-ARMOR] TATTERED RAGS

Rarity: None Quality: F Durability: — The tattered remains of what used to be clothing. They’re quite dirty and belong in the trash.

[EQUIPMENT-ARMOR] TATTERED SHOES

Rarity: None Quality: F Durability: — The tattered remains of what used to be shoes. They’re quite dirty and belong in the trash.

I feel downright shameless now that I have my bust back. Before, that had been the least of my worries, but this is *definitely* no good. It will be quite an issue if I head into town. I’m liable to be banned.

Judging by the equipment screen, it looks like I’ve become exactly the

character I initially made in the character creator. My efforts weren't a complete waste! However, the race modifiers have made my skin a bit paler than before. Maybe that's because I'm undead? Although my skin is quite unhealthy looking, you thankfully can't see the blood vessels. This *is* a game, after all.

When I look around, I see a faint black aura emanating from the zombies. Is that my Magia Trace in action? They are dark attribute, so black makes sense. It's quite distinct from the haze of my Dark Aura, so I doubt I'll mistake them. Seeing as they disappear when I toggle my skill off, there can be little doubt that my new magic vision is at work.

Now then, before I rebuild my character, let's try that sword again. My build will change quite a bit based on whether I can get a sword or not.

As always, the zombies don't attack me, so I head straight for the third level. A fully functioning body makes it much easier to walk instead of resorting to my previous shamble. I can properly see and hear, and it feels like I'm going at twice the speed I used to be capable of. The race description said I have low agility now—so just how bad are zombies?

I reach the dead end on the third floor and promptly enter the secret room.

So, what now? Oh, that dang sword is floating again. Guess my transformation was a no go—eh? Instead of stabbing me, this time the blade floats slowly toward me hilt first. Maybe my new evolution is the condition necessary to claim it? Without further hesitation, I grab hold of it. My body's freedom isn't taken away: Looks like it's not like that scripted event from before. The sword quickly disappears, enveloped in glowing light.

Now that that hindrance is gone, I can go check out that gravestone, which has been bothering me. The stone is already well worn, and I can't make out the inscription. If it's in such a bad state despite being sealed underground, just how old is it...? I guess there's also the chance that upper management designed it like this because it was too much of a pain to think up a proper backstory.

It's also possible they just got carried away designing this race... Well, it doesn't matter. If I can't read it, then I'm not interested. Plus, there's something

more pertinent. A full set of equipment is now laying before me on the floor, as if offered up to me. I get the feeling this isn't supposed to be for early game. Hmm...is that why there were no hints on how to find it? Maybe the hints are outside, even. In any case, let's pick up these drops.

You have obtained extra equipment. Please choose the equipment you want to use.

They each have similar stats. However, some have different effects to match specific weapons.

Looks like I can choose between the following:

One-Handed Sword, Two-Handed Sword

One-Handed Spear, Two-Handed Spear

One-Handed Axe, Two-Handed Axe

One-Handed Hammer, Two-Handed Hammer

Tanto, Katana, Tachi

Dagger, Rapier

Short Bow, Long Bow

Wand, Staff

And so on and so forth. Jeez, there's quite a selection here, isn't there?

As for the armor...

Faded Dress of Protection

Faded Plate of Protection

Whew, there's only two of them. Once you choose the chest piece, it will give you the rest of the set. Thankfully, they have a preview available for curious gamers like me. The plate armor is just as the name implies: a knight's armor indeed! It's a very solid set as well.

The dress is just like a dress you would find in anime. But the dress's luster doesn't look like any everyday fabric. It has a sort of gloss as if it was made of flowing metal. Also, it boldly exposes quite a bit of my chest. It's shaped like a black tube top with a long, white tank over it. At the neckline is a fusion of a choker and capelet, with a flower-shaped fastener holding it together.

The long gloves are crafted from lace, ending at a ring meant to go around my middle finger. They only cover the back of my hands, but stretch from my wrist all the way up to my biceps. The boots go up to my knees. On my head is a headdress—well, maybe I should call it a tiara. On each side, it is decorated with the same flower motif as the collar. There's a necklace hanging down onto my neckline and my chest. It's just as extravagant as you might expect. Three bejeweled bangles adorn each of my arms.

Between the plate armor and the dress, I definitely want to go for the dress. Rather, I feel like the armor would be for someone masculine, meaning I'd be an immortal prince rather than a princess. Hmm, but would someone princely be able to select the dress too...? Ah, let's put that aside for now.

I don't object to any of it besides the chest area. But if I'm going for it, I might as well pick the cuter option. I'm worried about the weight of full plate armor, and having it completely covering my face is a bit much for my tastes.

It doesn't look like I can open any other menus until I select my equipment. They're not going to let me use Appraisal on them. I can't see which is more powerful.

Now then, what should I do about the weapon? It looks like I can pick basically anything, and this will likely decide the weapon I'll continue to use from here on out. Should I just pick whichever looks the best? I've never even held a weapon IRL before, so I'll need some time to get used to it regardless of what I pick to use in-game.

I have low strength, so I'd usually avoid a close-range weapon, but these are

all magic weapons. Their attack seems to depend on my intelligence stat too.

Hmm, okay. Let's go with the rapier. It goes nicely with the dress!

You have selected the rapier and dress set. Are you satisfied with this selection?

Definitely satisfied.

You have obtained the extra equipment, rapier and dress set.

[EQUIPMENT-WEAPON] FADED RAPIER OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — A magic weapon altered to fit the desires of its new master. The slender blade is double-edged with a sharp point. It is well suited for both slashes and stabs. Although it feels very light to its master, to anyone else, it is far heavier than it looks.

A weapon made to answer its master's deepest desires, its abilities will change based on its master's fighting style. Although it has faded, it is made from a mysterious metal and gives off a strange, mystical presence. This blade deals physical damage based on Strength and Spirit, and magic damage based on Intelligence. It additionally functions as a magic catalyst.

LIBERTÀ: Consumes an orb to add additional damage to the next attack.

SPIRAL MAGI-AMP LV 1: MP poured into the blade will generate a spiral around it, increasing damage.

[EQUIPMENT-WEAPON] FADED RING OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — A magic ring transformed to fit its new master. It is made from a mysterious metal and gives off a strange aura. Gathers excess MP to generate orbs.

[EQUIPMENT-ARMOR] FADED TIARA OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — A magic tiara that accompanied the princess to the grave and beyond. It is made from a mysterious metal and has a mystical presence. Makes the wearer's thoughts clearer.

[EQUIPMENT-ARMOR] FADED DRESS OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Magic dress-armor that accompanied the princess in her final hour. It is made from a mysterious metal and has an unusual feeling around it. Heals the wearer's fatigue.

[EQUIPMENT-ARMOR] FADED GLOVES OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Magic long gloves that accompanied the princess into the great beyond. They are made from a mysterious metal and feel otherworldly. Allow the wearer to move their arms more nimbly.

[EQUIPMENT-ARMOR] FADED BOOTS OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Magic plate boots that accompanied the princess to her final resting place. They are made from a mysterious metal and emit a distinctive aura. Support the wearer's walking.

[EQUIPMENT-STORAGE] FADED POUCH OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — A magic belt pouch that accompanied the princess to the end of her time. It comes as a set with the sword belt. It is made from a mysterious metal and casts a curious presence.

[EQUIPMENT-ACCESSORY] FADED NECKLACE OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — A magic necklace that accompanied the princess to the afterlife. It is made from a mysterious metal and gemstone and gives off a strange presence. The wearer will tire more slowly.

[EQUIPMENT-ACCESSORY] FADED EARRINGS OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — A pair of magic earrings that accompanied the princess beyond her last gasp. They are made from a mysterious metal and curious gemstones and give off a haunting presence. Increases the wearer's concentration.

[EQUIPMENT-ACCESSORY] FADED BANGLES OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Magic bangles that accompanied the princess through her final moments. They are made from a mysterious metal and splendid gemstones and radiate a unique aura. Protects the wearer from ill intent.

[EQUIPMENT-APPEARANCE] FADED UNDERWEAR OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — A magic set of undergarments that kept the purity of the princess as she departed this realm.

Looks like it's an entire faded-protection set. Nice! They even courteously added some royal underwear. No need to wait around, let's just put it all on. It's a pain to manually equip everything, so I'll be using the game system. I can put up with second-hand equipment, but underwear...? Well, it's a game, so I guess it's okay.

Oh, that's right. I should check just in case. Help menu...extra equipment...

ABOUT ITEM RARITY

Item rarity is displayed as follows:

Normal: NO

These items are common and can be found anywhere and everywhere.

Rare: RA

You'll find them if you look for them carefully.

Epic: EP

You search and search and finally are rewarded by finding an ultra-rare object.

Legend: LE

Must be forged using base materials.

God: GO

These are divine artifacts made by a god. They are tied to their owner and cannot be stolen or broken. Although they can exhibit extraordinary abilities, they are incredibly rare.

Extra: EX

Ex-rank items range from joke items to scenario specific goods. They come in various forms. In some cases, the developers got carried away or wanted to

have a bit of fun. The prizes from official events will also be labeled EX. Just like GO-ranked items, they cannot be stolen or broken.

***Equipment performance can be ranked as follows:
Normal < Rare < Epic < Legend < Extra < God. However, due to the wide range of EX items, some may match GO items in performance, though you'll have to find that out for yourself.***

So how good is this equipment? I think my new gear falls under the category of something one of the developers got carried away with. That probably means that someone up top designed it to their personal tastes; after all, there was definitely a lot of time and patience invested in its appearance. My Appraisal skill is too low for me to see its detailed stats—I guess that's one of the downsides of living in the catacombs. There's nothing here to Appraise.

I'm worried about a potential nip slip, but they probably wouldn't let that happen in a game. And honestly, I'm more concerned about flashing some whale tail. The outfit comes with those socks too—knee socks.

In any case, it looks strong, so I don't want to take it off. It's not like I have anything else to change into, anyway.

The dress is heavier than it looks. The description says it's made of a mysterious metal, maybe some fantasy metal thread that can be spun into cloth. That would explain the curious luster it has. What type of armor skill would work with it, then...?

The Armor skill is apparently divided into three categories: Cloth, Light, and Heavy. Maybe I'll find out if I raise my appraisal.

I wrap the belt, which matches the design of the dress, around my waist and position the pouch where it'll be out of the way. The rapier hangs from a scabbard on the left, a little further forward than the pouch. With everything just so, I can hold a sword while rummaging through the pouch with my left hand.

There's a knuckle guard on the rapier. It's a one-handed sword cast in black and white to match my new clothes...which is what I'd *like* to say, but

unfortunately, it's faded, and the color is closer to ash.

It's about time I respond to that assertive rebuild pop-up in the corner of my eye. Looks like the rules for a rebuild are...

- 1. Reselect your skills from the initial skill tab.***
- 2. Once selected, you can reallocate your skills up to your total skill level before the rebuild begins.***
- 3. After all selections are made, the rebuild will be complete.***

Total pre-rebuild skill level: 57

All right, let's do it! I already know what I'm going for. First, I'll need Sword. It will branch off into Rapier. Next, Armor: I don't know which type it is, but I should at least get the base skill for now. I can't forget about snagging Appraisal and then Identify, which gives more detailed information about an enemy.

I want to touch on the production skills a bit. Hmm, I think I'll take Alchemy and Cooking just for the stat modifiers. The first because it's a fantasy world, the second because I do it in real life, even though I don't have to eat in-game. Oh, but it would be a waste to use up my initial skill slots with production skills, wouldn't it? You can unlock production skills just by obtaining the production starter kits, so I can get them later.

That leaves me with six slots to go...

Magic, magic—oh, I see some color on the MP gauge. Looks like I can use magic now! Sweet! It did say I had high spirit and intelligence. Dark Magic sounds like a good idea. Wait, I'd be better off getting Dark Magic as a monster skill. Then my other options are...hmm. Maybe I should take Light Magic? I can see a combination of light and dark being a powerful combo. It's really going to let me choose it, even if light is my race's weakness?

My agility is low, so it'll be hard to dodge. Luckily, my equipment can't break, so let's take Defend and Parry.

Three skills left.

Should I use one slot on Detect, perhaps? It lets you see hidden things, and it will display a different color over an enemy's weakness; that sounds like a good skill for a rapier fighter. And then there's Perception. I want to avoid sneak attacks, and I don't know how to unlock it otherwise. As for the last one...hmm, how about Footwork? That might not be bad to have to make up for my low agility.

The skill slots go down one by one. This is different from my skill points, right? Race skills included, my current skill levels add up to 57. That's left me with 39 points to allocate excluding race skills, so let's invest them into the ones I think will be difficult to raise. Thankfully, Identify has no skill level so I don't have to think about it.

I remember reading on the forums that people were having trouble raising Appraisal, so let's pour in a generous 19 points. That leaves 20 for me to work with. Four points into Perception, Detect, Physical Resistance, Physical Immunity, and Magical Resistance, leaving me with a grand total of zero left. I pick up Dark Magic from my race skill menu as soon as the rebuild is over.

Once that's done, my final stat screen looks like this:

Name: Anastasia

Race: Immortal Princess ♀ Lv 1

Attribute: Dark

Genus: High Undead

Species: Royal Zombie

Skill Points: 22

SKILLS:

Sword Lv 1, Defend Lv 1, Parry Lv 1, Armor Lv 1, Light Magic Lv 1, Magic Assist Lv 1, Perception Lv 5, Detect Lv 5, Footwork Lv 1, Appraisal Lv 20, Identify

RACE (MONSTER) SKILLS:

Dark Magic Lv 1, Dark Aura Lv 1, Physical Resistance Lv 5, Physical Immunity Lv 5, Magical Resistance Lv 5, Automatic HP Regen Lv 1, Undying Royalty Lv 1, Royal Privilege Lv 1, High Undead

Yeah, that looks fine to me. Oh, and I got Magic Assist as soon as I learned magic. It seems you automatically get it as soon as you learn one magic skill. Seeing as I can now cast Firestarter and Drinking Water, it might be for convenience's sake.

You have met the requirements. An art has been modified: Step

Step is an art associated with footwork. Oh, looks like it became Princess Step—not that I know the difference. The requirement was probably my race, though it feels like the dev team went out of their way to add “princess” to it. Step itself is a common skill that moves you forward a bit. There aren't any invincibility frames in it though. My main goal with Footwork was the stat correction, so it doesn't really matter.

More importantly, let's see my equipment. Is Appraisal Lv 20 strong enough?

Oh. The description hasn't changed at all.

[EQUIPMENT-WEAPON] FADED RAPIER OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Appraisal Lv 10

ATK: △ MATK: △

DEF: △ MDEF: △

Attack type: Stab, Slash

Affected by Skills: Rapier, Magic Assist

Appraisal Lv 20

When Magic Assist is active, you can amplify its attack by pouring in MP

Critical Rate Boost: Minor

Critical Damage Boost: Minor

Magic Attack Boost: Minor

Chant Speed Boost: Minor

[EQUIPMENT-WEAPON] FADED RING OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Appraisal Lv 10

DEF: △ MDEF: △

Appraisal Lv 20

When equipped to an additional accessory slot, the ring will enter a state of Meditation in its wearer's place. The wearer will perpetually receive the benefits of Meditation without any penalties.

[EQUIPMENT-ARMOR] FADED TIARA OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Appraisal Lv 10

DEF: △ MDEF: △

Affected by Skills: Light

Appraisal Lv 20

Chant Speed Boost: Minor

[EQUIPMENT-ARMOR] FADED DRESS OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Appraisal Lv 10

DEF: △ MDEF: △

Affected by Skills: Light

Appraisal Lv 20

HP Recovery Rate Boost: Minor

MP Recovery Rate Boost: Minor

[EQUIPMENT-ARMOR] FADED GLOVES OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Appraisal Lv 10

DEF: △ MDEF: △

Affected by Skills: Light

Appraisal Lv 20

Dexterity Boost: Minor

[EQUIPMENT-ARMOR] FADED BOOTS OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Appraisal Lv 10

DEF: △ MDEF: △

Affected by Skills: Light

Appraisal Lv 20

Grants Way of Walking: Minor

[EQUIPMENT-STORAGE] FADED POUCH OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Appraisal Lv 10

DEF: △ MDEF: △

Appraisal Lv 20

Storage Expansion: Minor

[EQUIPMENT-ACCESSORY] FADED NECKLACE OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Appraisal Lv 10

DEF: △ MDEF: △

Appraisal Lv 20

Stamina Boost: Minor

[EQUIPMENT-ACCESSORY] FADED EARRINGS OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Appraisal Lv 10

DEF: △ MDEF: △

Appraisal Lv 20

Intelligence Boost: Minor

[EQUIPMENT-ACCESSORY] FADED BANGLES OF PROTECTION

Rarity: EX Quality: S+ Durability: — Appraisal Lv 10

DEF: △ MDEF: △

Appraisal Lv 20

Spirit Boost: Minor

SET EFFECTS:

1. Automatic HP Regen: Minor

2. Damage Reduction: Minor

3. Reaction Speed Enhancement: Minor

4. Strengthen Skill: Dark Aura

Looks like this set's a lot stronger than I was expecting. Unfortunately, it just shows whether it increases or decreases a stat instead of any specific values. Anyway, seems that it's classified as light armor, so now I know what direction to take that skill in. Incidentally, the underwear really is purely cosmetic. It provides no effects other than modesty.

I don't know how long this set will be with me, but I really don't want to pay for equipment upgrades, so I'll have to use it as best I can. I'm also curious about the set effect Reaction Speed Enhancement: Minor. That sounds close to an agility boost.

REACTION SPEED ENHANCEMENT

Allows your body to react more quickly. While agility raises your overall speed, this raises reaction speed specifically. It will only take effect when dodging projectiles or defending against attacks. In exchange, it will grant a higher boost than agility in these circumstances.

Oh, that would certainly be a boon to royalty. As for the Way of Walking tied to the boots...

WAY OF WALKING

Poor footing does not impede your actions.

That's also a treat! The set effects seem like they're mostly defensive, with the Dark Aura enhancement as the only exception. Going through the bonus effects of each piece of equipment, it looks like they do nothing for my strength or agility. I'm already in a bad place there considering my race, so maybe it's time to just give up on them. There's no use in asking for what I can't have. As for weapons, apparently the ring counts as one. It occupies the same slot as a shield.

It's currently on my left hand, but while there's a metal piece that reaches around my finger, there is no gemstone in its cavity. Instead, there's a swirl of dark light about the size of a glass marble. This seems like the part it uses to generate "orbs" from my excess MP—meaning this black swirl is mana and it's using any MP I recover beyond my limit.

Incidentally, it's impossible to see without Magia Trace, which I consider more proof that my assumption is right. There's a high chance it's taken on the "Dark" magic alignment because of my attribute.

I can pass the ring's orbs over to the weapon and consume them to boost the power of my next attack. So that must mean the weapon and the ring are a set.

If I concentrate on routing mana into the weapon itself, it looks like the blade

is enveloped in a dim swirl of light. This must be Spiral Magi-Amp in action. Since it has a skill level, I can probably level it up and boost the conversion rate. This means that at first, it will only boost the damage by a small percentage. On the other hand, Libertà consumes orbs and has no skill level. It's probably a trump card to use in a tight situation, while Spiral Magi-Amp should be used routinely so I can level it up—I should use it often, as long as my MP doesn't run out.

Problem is, I'll generate orbs slower if I use MP. It seems I can store a stack of orbs in my inventory, so I'll have to stock up on them outside of battle. Looks like I can store some orbs in my sword as well.

Now then, I have some free space in my accessory slots, so let's equip this ring.

As you have not learned Meditation, you cannot receive these effects.

Oh...well...huh. Looks like I learn that when I hit Magic Assist level 15. It boosts my MP recovery rate, but you can't move while using it unless you have a magic catalyst. If I can use it without any of the penalties applied, that may mean I can move around normally. It takes up my left hand and an accessory slot, but gaining that skill sure seems worth it.

Now let's put this catacombs life behind us and make our way to the surface. I'll head out before I contact Akina. It's not like I know where the catacombs even are, so maybe I'll be able to orient myself.

Official BBS 2

[Beginner?] Comprehensive Thread 5 [Expert?]

1. Passing Adventurer

This thread is for all your general questions!

Ask anything you want. It's up to fate whether you receive an answer or not.

For questions about skills, head here: [http:// * * * * *](http://* * * * *)

Past threads: [http:// * * * * *](http://* * * * *)

>> 980 Congratulations, you are the chosen one. I grant you the right to post in the following thread.

295. Passing Adventurer

How do time and weather work in this game?

296. Passing Adventurer

>> 295 One real world day is four in-game days. The weather is randomized.

297. Passing Adventurer

>> 296 So that's six real hours a day then? And they keep their stores open all night too, unlike IRL.

298. Passing Adventurer

>> 297 Right, whether to make stuff realistic or game-like was decided by whether management thought it was interesting or not. It would be a problem if the shops were all closed when some of the working adult players can only play at night, so they leaned toward making it game-like in that regard.

But to make it a little more realistic, the NPCs you see do change based on the time slot. As for weather, we've confirmed clear skies, cloudy, rain, gales, heavy rain, and thunderstorms. And thunderstorms can start without warning. Oh, and regardless of the time of day, a crimson moon can take up the sky, changing AI patterns and causing enemies to spawn *en masse*. Be careful about that.

299. Passing Adventurer

>> 298 Got it. Thanks!

300. Passing Adventurer

>> 299 Incidentally, the day is split between dawn, daytime, dusk, and night.

Here's a breakdown:

Dawn 0:00-0:30, Day 0:30-3:00, Dusk 3:00-3:30, Night 3:30-6:00.

Dawn 6:00-6:30, Day 6:30-9:00, Dusk 9:00-9:30, Night 9:30-12:00.

Dawn 12:00-12:30, Day 12:30-15:00, Dusk 15:00-15:30, Night 15:30-18:00.

Dawn 18:00-18:30, Day 18:30-21:00, Dusk 21:00-21:30, Night 21:30-24:00.

We don't know if there's an in-game calendar system yet. Well, a week IRL would be a month in-game, so there probably will be. They do classify days as fire, water, wind, and earth, all based on the four elements.

301. Passing Adventurer

>> 300 So a real day is an in-game week (4 days). That's good to know!

302. Passing Adventurer

>> 301 Yeah! Go out and get 'em!

303. *Passing Adventurer*

I saw a player with text over their head saying they were a farmer. What's up with that?

304. *Passing Adventurer*

>> 303 Did you see who it was? That's a title. If you start tilling a field, you get the farmer title.

305. *Passing Adventurer*

>> 304 So it's like an occupation?

306. *Passing Adventurer*

>> 305 No, it's mostly cosmetic. The title does come with some effects, but nothing big. The farmer title lowers the chance of bugs eating the harvest and raises growth speed and yield quality. You still get the title effects even if you don't display it. If you do display it, anyone can see it. It's like you're advertising how you've decided to play the game, or it's just bragging rights.

307. *Passing Adventurer*

>> 306 I see. So can you go after the ones you want?

308. *Passing Adventurer*

>> 307 There are lots of ways to get a title. Some of them you can aim for. Others come with learning certain skills—most of the production ones are like that. Some come after fulfilling various conditions, so do your best. I believe there was a title thread. You might want to check it out. You'll probably get one if you beat one of the bosses for the first time.

309. *Passing Adventurer*

>> 309 Thanks for the info. I'm def not doing that.

426. Passing Adventurer

I cut my hair and now I want it back. What do I do?

427. Passing Adventurer

>> 426 Sell your soul to Future Software. *Cha-ching!*

428. Passing Adventurer

>> 427 Seriously...

429. Passing Adventurer

>> 428 Yah, seriously. You have to go buy one of the normal or premium creator tickets. By the by, even if you created your character in the premium creator, you can use a normal ticket if you just want to grow your hair out. You're fine as long as you don't change your premium parts.

430. Passing Adventurer

>> 429 I see. So it's not going to empty my wallet.

431. Passing Adventurer

>> 430 Well, once we find the ingredients in-game, we might be able to make a hair-growth formula. But for now, microtransactions are the only option. There's no telling how effective a hair-growth formula would be, anyway, so the cash shop's the only way you can reliably get the exact length you want.

432. Passing Adventurer

>> 431 Got it. Off to sell my soul to a corporation then.

433. Passing Adventurer

>> 432 Hey, they warned you at the start. You can cut your hair, but you can't grow it out. They said you can't *normally* grow it out, though—maybe that's them hinting that there's another way. But that's a long way in the future!

Chapter 6:

Starting Town Monday-Friday

IT'S THE SUN! It's just around dawn, by the look of things. I've been in the catacombs the entire in-game day. Since IRL working adults can only play the game at night, to ensure they don't miss out on anything, one day in real time is equal to four days in FLFO. A day passes every six hours, and as it's a little after 6:00 p.m. IRL, that means it's daybreak. Those working adults will see another sunrise at midnight.

I step out and look at the mini-map. There's a straight line drawn on it. When I pull up the area map, I see it's guiding me toward the nearest town. How delightful. I'm not going to suddenly find myself lost.

The map lists it as the starting town, so I'm sure that's where all the fine humans started their journeys. There's a fair distance between the catacombs and the town to go, but I don't have much of a choice if I want to be anywhere but here.

Looking at my clothing once more in the sunlight, the color is a bit dubious. The base color scheme is black with white accents, but as the name of the equipment implied, it's all faded. Every item is much closer to gray than black and white. In the sun it's honestly a bit pitiful to look at...

And, like, I get what they were going for with this outfit, but it's quite a different experience when I'm the one who has to wear it. Maybe instead of shameless, let's just say my outfit is sexy and call it a day—at least for my sake.

Though FLFO is a game, it might be a bit pleasant to dress like this and play pretend. After all, it's not like I'll ever wear this outfit in real life. The problem is that I feel something might, well...slip out even when I'm just standing around. And honestly, I get even more anxious when I move around. Since it's a game, I think it will be a fine, but that knowledge does little to quell my anxiety. Perhaps management, or rather, whoever designed this dress, never expected someone to wear it in *this* size...

My thoughts are interrupted as I unexpectedly collapse to the floor. A window appears asking whether I'd like to wait to revive or return to my registered respawn point.

I didn't even fight anyone... I guess for now, let's return to my unfortunate home away from home. A familiar ceiling—I'm back, my dear catacombs. Did you miss me?

Crud, what was that? I'm not missing any pieces—I'm as safe as one can be. Checking the logs, it looks like my Auto HP Regen went up a few levels. But why...?

Ah! Oh dear—what an embarrassment! How careless of me! I must have passed on from the perpetual damage I receive while in sunlight. I kept taking damage, so I had to keep recovering perpetually. I totally forgot that I can't walk around in the daytime until my HP Regen exceeds the damage I take. But if I look at this from an optimistic perspective, I'll raise my regen skill just by enjoying a nice stroll. Perhaps I should have raised it a bit more before the rebuild for the bonus skill points.

The biggest factor this time is likely the fact that I kept the pain setting turned off. I'm still undead, so the pain I feel might be a bit different from that of humans. And with no pain at all, there's no way to tell I'm taking damage. Let's set that back to the default, then.

Huh? Looks like there are more options. What's this supposed to mean?

MOVEMENT ASSIST: ROYALTY

• ***On***

• ***Off***

****You will carry yourself like a regal prince or an elegant princess. Alterations will be made to your standing posture and walking form. There are special motions associated with certain arts as well. Corrections may be significant. Please exercise caution.***

Hmm, that sounds interesting. I assume it came from my race having the word “princess” in it, though someone really got carried away here. It seems amusing, so let’s set it to “on” for fun.

The moment the option flips on, I can feel my posture subtly shifting. It’s mostly the placement of my feet: My right foot pulls back a bit behind my left. My back is stretched straight and erect, my chest sticks out, and I stand a bit more proudly. Although the game might’ve taken my original posture into account, as it doesn’t feel like that much of a difference.

Still, it’s quite a powerful assist. If I want to use it, it’ll take some getting used to; it’s not the sort of setting to switch on suddenly. I assume it’s there for people who want to roleplay.

Let’s keep using it. My posture does need some work, and with this dress on, it probably looks better than slouching.

Even so, is there no option for notifications? It’s hard to tell when my skill levels go up, and even if I unlock a skill, the message just sneaks its way into the battle log. It’s quite easy to miss...

Hmmm? Oh, there it is! Looks like I can set it individually for each skill, and I can set how many levels it has to increase before I’m notified. I can even choose the notification sound. Neat!

You generally get a new art every five levels. Let’s turn off notifications for the ones without arts and set the arts ones to notify me every five levels. As for the sound, let’s choose something that won’t get drowned out.

While I’m at it, I check over the other notification settings and close the menu. Evolution and level up notifications are already set, so they should be fine as is.

Come to think of it, this latest evolution set me back to level 1. I’ll need to hunt some zombies and raise my level if I ever hope to find a party. How does this game handle party level differences, anyway? Ah, that can wait. Let’s try to get back on track! Level 1 is a bit sad to look at, and hunting will help me test my equipment. Let’s go!

ZOMBIE LV 8

A rotting, revived corpse. They flock around whoever they see.

Attribute: Dark

Weakness: Light, Holy, Fire

Resists: Dark, Physical

Genus: Undead

Species: Zombie

Status: Normal

Looks like Identify added a boatload of new information. Is Detect working properly? I don't see anything that looks like a weak spot on this zombie. Is my level too low to perceive anything? Or do the undead just not have weak points?

For now, let's just try hacking away at things with my new blade. *En garde*—take this!



It goes down in one hit. The moment the rapier slices through its neck, the zombie dissipates into particles of light. Sadly, I didn't feel any of that Movement Assist option in combat. That's a letdown...

Well, let's try the second floor then. A high zombie doesn't go down in one hit. Instead, it takes four. Or maybe I should try picking a fight with the living dead on the third floor. I've never fought them before. When I tried, I was killed almost immediately, so that doesn't count as a genuine fight.

I circle behind the lowest level living dead I can find, take aim at its neck, and slice from the left as hard as I can. The attack chips away roughly 20 percent of its hit points, and before it can turn to face me, I slash at it again. The blade traces a line from top right to bottom left.

As a test, I try guarding against its swinging arm and nearly lose my balance. My block didn't even stop all the damage!

With a few repeated lunges, the living dead finally goes down. I'm using a rapier, after all; it's better at stabbing than slashing. I'd estimate I shaved off around 10 percent per attack. The first one was 20 percent due to the sneak attack bonus.

Your Race Level has increased!

The living dead range in level from 27 to 29, making them a great source of EXP. More damage got through my guard than I'd like to admit, but I should be able to manage with my HP regen. The other monsters don't attack me, so I'll be fine to rest a bit before going to the next one.

Though my strength and agility are positively abysmal, I still have magic and defense. This is the power of a high undead with proper equipment. Though the EXP is delicious, I'm clearly growing slower than I was before. Even so, I saw a membrane of light envelop me when I tried to guard. Pretty cool, huh? It was a dull light, admittedly, but that's fine for now. Did I get that effect because I guarded with a weapon?

[INGREDIENT] POISONED MEAT

Rarity: NO Quality: C

While it looks like normal meat at a glance, it contains a toxic poison.

Can be used as bait for traps.

It's not quite trash—but I can't use it, so it's essentially garbage to me. I remember Akina saying she's somewhere around Level 10. I'll set that as my goal.

Sword has reached Level 5.

Acquired Sword Art: Slash

Defend has reached Level 5.

Acquired Defend Art: Arrow Guard

Parry has reached Level 5.

Acquired Parry Art: Arrow Parry

Since my enemies are so high leveled, it's quite easy to raise my initial skills. Additionally, my defensive skills are going up all at once. Thankfully, Defend grows even when I block with my sword. It looks like it goes up whenever I'm hit by an attack.

Now, on to the all-important arts I've gained! Slash is just a powerful cutting attack. Arrow Guard is a technique to block any non-magical long-range attack—it essentially lowers the damage I take. Arrow Parry will allow me to dodge non-magic long-range attacks.

Come to think of it, my foes are weak against Light Magic, aren't they? I should go for it. I'll get a x4 modifier.

I automatically begin to chant as soon as I concentrate on the magic I want to

use; there's a gauge in my field of view. I can use the spell as soon as the gauge fills up, and I invoke it by saying the spell name.

Normally, I'd be using a wand or staff—when you hold a magic catalyst, the spell manifests and flies from the end. Since the description said the rapier was a catalyst, will it shoot from the tip, then?

The only Light spell I can use right now is Light Ball. It takes four seconds to cast, though I'm sure it will get faster over time. As soon as I say the spell name, a ball of light manifests at the tip of my rapier, shooting out towards the back of a living dead's head.

The ball pops on collision, taking 80 percent of its HP bar with it. I finish off the rest with a few stabs.

Wow, Light Ball is very strong. Someone must have gone insane to implement a 4× multiplier. I need to be careful myself. The moment someone uses anything light against me I'm done for.

Back to hunting, then.

Light Magic has reached Level 5.

Acquired Light Magic spell: Light Heal

Magic Assist has reached Level 5.

Acquired Magic Assist spells: Heating, Cooling, Gentle Breeze

What delicious new treats! But is firing off the spells even necessary? They come out of the tip of my rapier, so can't I just thrust it at them? I produce another ball of light at the tip of my blade and thrust it toward the back of my foe's head. The rapier stabs in a moment after the ball bursts...and the living dead is gone. If the spell wasn't enough to finish it, I also attacked its weak spot.

Everything's coming along. I'd even go so far as to say it finally feels like the game has properly begun. Granted, up to this point, I've been mapping and playing FLFO like I'm in a kaizo game. There was my "light" stroll on top of that...

Magic Assist has reached Level 5. Gained 1 Skill Point.

Acquired Magic Assist Spells: Laundry, First Aid

Laundry gets rid of stains, and First Aid is a spell that treats minor wounds.

Now ain't that a treat! Akina had her doubts, but I can't imagine anything topping this. Admittedly, I can't say I'm raising my skills equally across the board, which is a problem. Come to think of it, I get 1 SP every 10 skill levels as well as every Race Level. Would they be confiscated if I had to rebuild? I highly doubt I'd get any SP if I just raised a skill past 10 while rebuilding, though—I think it's specific to leveling up in-game.

The drops are...well, to put it simply, every single one is garbage. But a bit more hunting still won't hurt. Instinctively I feel a level up is coming soon.

Your Race Level has increased!

Light Magic has reached Level 10. Gained 1 Skill Point.

Acquired Light Magic Spell: Light Arrow

Name: Anastasia

Race: Immortal Princess ♀ Lv 10

Attribute: Dark

Genus: High Undead

Species: Royal Zombie

Skill Points: 33

SKILLS:

Sword Lv 8, Defend Lv 5, Parry Lv 5, Armor Lv 5,

Light Magic Lv 10, Magic Assist Lv 12, Perception Lv 8, Detect Lv 7, Footwork Lv 4, Appraisal Lv 20, Identify

RACE (MONSTER) SKILLS:

Dark Magic Lv 1, Dark Aura Lv 3, Physical Resistance Lv 6, Physical Immunity Lv 6, Magical Resistance Lv 5, Automatic HP Regen Lv 7, Undying Royalty Lv 4, Royal Privilege Lv 1, High Undead

I continued grinding, stopping for dinner between exploration sessions. My skills are growing nicely. I'm sad to say I have no one to compare myself to, but my Physical Resistance and Physical Immunity skills are rising steadily. The condition for raising both is to be struck by physical attacks. Unfortunately, as my enemies don't use magic, my Magical Resistance remains unchanged.

The ring has also created its first orb.

[MATERIAL] MAGIC ORB

Rarity: EX Quality : — A spherical mass of magical energy. It has no impurities and would make for a highly effective source of energy. Some caution is required while handling it.

Cannot be traded.

Once the orb is generated, you can remove it and store it as an item. The next orb starts generating as soon as the first one is removed. It seems like a good idea to remove them as soon as they're complete. I also obtained this as well:

[MATERIAL] DARK PART

Rarity: RA Quality: C

An item used to restore an undead's missing body parts.

After selecting the item, choose the desired part and wait for regeneration.

It's a rare drop. Somehow, I managed to secure three of them.

Next, I want to raise Automatic HP Regen and get ready to head for town—but first, let's get some sleep. It's Tuesday tomorrow. I'll have another sunbath when I get back in-game.

I log out and do the usual routine: bathroom, stretch, lie down, and go to sleep.

The next day, I log in as soon as I return from school. I intend to reach the starting town today, but that depends on my Automatic HP Regen skill...so it's probably not happening. I'll be able to go as soon as my regen exceeds the damage I take in the sunlight. Until then, I'll hang around the entrance to the catacombs, raising the skill while keeping a close eye on my HP bar so I don't end up dead.

I promptly make my way to the entrance and stick one arm out into the sunlight. My HP bar gradually depletes. Though nothing seems to change with my appearance, I feel a throbbing pain in my limb. Next, I try adding another arm, which makes the bar go down even faster. It looks like I take more damage the more exposed I am. It drops far faster once I try putting my entire body out there. Huh, I can understand why I died so quickly last time. Back then, my recovery speed was even slower than it is right now.

Still, it's going down this fast even with my recovery boost from High Undead. My clothes have the same effect, yet still it drops like a rock freefalling through the skies. My restrictions might be lowering my recovery speed...

Either the sun is bad news, or my recovery is shoddy. This tingling stimulation is telling me it's gotta be the sun.

I keep an eye on my HP bar and return to the shadows to recover when it gets too low. Then I head out again and wait until the last second before it's too late. It's an endless, but necessary, cycle.

On Friday, when I logged in after school and got back to raising my skill, my Automatic HP Regen finally reached Level 15. To think it took three whole IRL days to reach this level! Skill levels are more important than your character level, so it seems. With that, I log out from the catacombs and eat dinner.

“It’s been two weeks, Sis. How’s your progress...?”

“I plan on heading to town after this.”

“Oh! *Finally!*”

“I actually got rid of Decaying Body three days ago, but I had another problem...”

“Really? You should be able to tell where the starting town is from the start.”

“It’s more fundamental than that.”

“Did something happen in-game?”

“Well, the sun’s too strong...”

“Oh, right! You take damage in the sun!”

“I’ve been raising my Automatic HP Regen skill since Tuesday. My recovery rate finally exceeds the damage.” I decided to keep silent on the previous outing that led to my untimely, embarrassing demise.

“There was an outcry in the beta about the sun being too strong for HP regen. Did they nerf the sun?”

“I don’t think they did.”

“Did your skill evolve or something?”

“Hmm, well, we’ll be meeting soon enough, so I guess I can give you some *spoilers.*”

I take out my connect board, bring up my character data, and hand it to Akina.

“Huh...?! What’s this?!”

“I got an extra race and extra equipment. I’ve been working real hard!”

“A high undead, but you’re totally a princess. Even your race says ‘princess.’ Oh jeez, your boobs are going to spill out. Ah, what did the race description say by the way? Did it affect your stats?”

“I have high Intelligence, Spirit, and Dexterity. As an undead, my endurance is pretty good, but my Strength and Agility are lower, I think. I took a screenshot.

Hmm...yes, that's about it."

"By the look of things, your INT and SPI are very high, followed by your DEX and END. Your other two stats are below humans, though."

"That's what I said. Is the phrasing that important?"

"Some would say so. Unlike the humanoid races, inhumans tend to have very unbalanced stats."

"Oh, well I guess a horse would be very different from a human."

"Yeah, a horse has an incredibly high top speed. On a side note, player horses are omnivorous."

"They are...? They eat *meat*?"

"Sure they do. They drink soup too!"

"Are there many inhumans in town?"

"You don't see too many of them around, but there are a few. The undead, well, you can spot them shamblin' around at night. They have a low player population, but they stand out. You'll know 'em when you see 'em."

"I look human though."

"True, but I'd say that dress and those boobs stand out quite a bit..."

"I'm having trouble looking down. I'm thinking I should have reduced them to something a bit less noticeable."

"Definitely not, Sis. Oh, this is my character!"

Akina's connect board displayed her character, who had silver hair and blue eyes and wore a set of leather armor. She was dressed in a way that brought the words "novice adventurer" to mind. Her weapon had a long shaft with a mix of a spear and an axe at the end.

"Is that a halberd?"

"Yep, it's a halberd for sure!"

"They sell them?"

"Not from the NPC shops. I asked someone I knew from the beta to make one

for me.”

“Oh, it’s a forged item then.”

“They can make katanas and kunai too.”

“There must be a few ninja in FLFO, then.”

“Yeah, I know a few ninja players.”

“Do you need to pick up Stone Throwing to use kunai?”

“You do. It branches into Projectile, and there’s also Sneak Step to dampen your footsteps. Their clothes are custom made as well!”

“Then do they make smoke bombs and caltrops too?”

“You’ll need Alchemy if you want smoke bombs. You could probably make caltrops through Smithing.”

Oh, we’re somehow talking about ninjas now. That’s an interesting way to play—but the way things are going, it looks like I’ll have to play as a princess.

“By the way, Sis, are you going to roleplay a princess?”

“There was an option to make my motions more royal-like in the menu. It makes me stand and walk like a true noble!”

“Wow! You’ve *got* to turn it on!”

“Ha ha, I was wearing a dress anyway, so I put it on. It’ll take some time to get used to.”

“Maybe I should try being your knight when I have the time. I plan on changing my armor to metal eventually.”

“Isn’t metal armor expensive?”

“Yeah, thing is though, that’s the least of my worries right now. We haven’t even gotten any iron yet. First, we’ll have to defeat the northern boss and develop the mining town.”

“They haven’t defeated any of them yet?”

“No, but it shouldn’t be long, hopefully.”

Levels were starting to cross ten, and skill levels were rising, so it wouldn’t be

long before one of the bosses went down. It depends on the skill, but most of the initial skills are essentially a tutorial stage. The real game starts once they branch off into the skills the player actually wants. The player needs to choose their specialty, especially when it comes to close-range weapons. Sword and polearm skills, for instance, are broad and shallow. Once they branch off into more specific weapons, they become narrow and deep. The effects of a specialized weapon skill are incomparable to what one would get from a general skill like Sword.

Magic, on the other hand, is specialized from the start. For this reason, it's harder to level magic than weapons. Some say that different races have bonus modifiers that make it easier to level certain skills. For an undead player like myself, this is probably why it's so easy to raise Automatic HP Regen.

The data is all hidden, so the players can only figure things out through trial and error. Those who like playing with numbers are hard at work on the forum. I've only ever seen a few entries that piqued my interest.

"Now let's game! I'm going to go hunting, Sis. You want to come with?"

"Nah, I'm still quite a distance from town. I'll have to take a rain check."

After cleaning the dishes and taking a bath, I return to my room to log back in.

So long catacombs, you've served me well these past two weeks. I don't know if—or when—I'll be back. Honestly, there's nothing here, so I don't see any need to return. The EXP gains are great, but boredom is the mortal enemy of an MMO junkie.

The pain from the sun has been reduced to a mild tingling. I'm sure I'll be a bit better off if my regen rises even further, but as it is, I'm still taking damage. It's never going to go away completely. After all, I'm not building a resistance to the sun, I'm just healing the damage I take.

Is there no Daywalker skill? Well, even if it exists, I doubt it will be easy to get. That's a skill that would conquer an undead's core weakness. My skill levels are rising just by standing in the sun, so let's just say it's a good thing.

I walk boldly and elegantly through the forest toward town. It's a bit dim,

what with the canopy cutting off the light. Not that it matters when I have night vision. The problem isn't the light but the *dress*. Though the skirt doesn't puff out, the back of it is quite long. It's not going to tear, but it'll be a pain if it gets snagged on everything.

As you might expect, I don't have any experience wandering a forest in a long, flowing skirt. This dress is going to be my main equipment for a while, so I need to get used to it. I'll be counting on you, Footwork.

What a lovely, refreshing sight all this nature is! The trees have truly moved me! But even the pristine light filtering through the canopy stings...

"Hmm...?"

There's a rustling...

A wild wolf appears!

The wolf bursts out of the thicket to my left—I grab my sword and spin as I slash at its neck before returning the blade to its scabbard. The wolf disintegrates just as it lands. It's no issue with my Perception and reaction speed enhancement. Said skill doesn't actually raise my agility, so if I'm targeted by an attack with a wide range, I'm not sure if I'll be able to escape in time.

I have confidence in my visual acuity, so I'll have to do my best with Defend and Parry. Wide AoE attacks should deal less damage, so I intend to count on Defend and Automatic HP Regen and hope and pray.

Hmm? Oh, I see. That wolf was my first non-undead kill. Ah, right. I need to turn Dark Aura off. With that adjusted, I get back on the road toward town.

After diligently making progress, I see a wall in the distance. Is it one of those fortified cities? Are those walls defense against monsters? Whichever it is, I've reached the starting town! Jeez, it was unnecessarily far.

It's already night in-game.

With all the distance between here and the catacombs, they can't be a graveyard used by the starting town. I guess I'll search around a bit, then get some sleep. I see loads of people with lanterns, but the blue markers over their heads mean they're players. NPCs are marked with green, while enemies are

red. Oh, and house pets are yellow.

The players seem to be chasing rabbits and wolves. It's a common scene, though it's quite surreal in full-dive VR. Looking closely at the people, I can see they each have a whitish haze wafting about them. The density varies from person to person, but the appearance is similar.

The wolves and rabbits have the same color around them as well. Is that what it looks like when they have MP but no specific attribute tied to it? When I look at the people using magic, I see their haze gathering around their staves. There, it gains a color and manifests as different types of magic. Notably, the haze is thicker around these magic users. Magia Trace is pretty convenient!

RABBIT LV 2

A common rabbit. They dig their burrows all over the plains.

These pitiful creatures make for a convenient meal. Too delicious for their own good.

Attribute: —

Weakness: —

Resists: —

Genus: Animal

Species: Rabbit

Status: Normal

WOLF LV 4

A common wolf. Those who don't know how to fight should steer clear of these vicious fighters. They become far more dangerous in packs. Extra caution is necessary when the pack has a leader.

They are edible. Their meat has no notable taste.

Attribute: —

Weakness: —

Resists: —

Genus: Animal

Species: Wolf

Status: Normal

Oh, so they're both monsters *and* food. Huh. It's a game, anyway. I guess you can eat most things. I dispatch a few wolves and rabbits on my way to town.

[INGREDIENT] WOLF MEAT

Rarity: NO Quality: C

Edible wolf meat. A bit tougher than rabbit meat. Lean with a refreshing flavor.

[MATERIAL] WOLF PELT

Rarity: NO Quality: C

The pelt of a wolf. It is not the best material for armor due to its low defense and endurance attributes.

[INGREDIENT] RABBIT MEAT

Rarity: NO Quality: C

Edible rabbit meat. Moderately fatty and incredibly tender without any distinctive flavor.

It's nice to have some meat to use for Cooking. As for the wolf pelt, I can find a good place to sell it.

Ignoring all the stares I'm probably getting because of the dress, I enter the

town. Those eyes on my chest are a usual occurrence even IRL: I'm not going to be bothered at this point. This is good equipment, and I'm not going to change it, nor do I have anything to change into, if I'm being honest.

A tutorial message pops up as soon as I'm within the town walls.

TUTORIAL: "Let's Open the Portal" has been generated.

Let's just follow along. My skirt, long hair, and breasts bouncing with each step, I briskly walk towards the central square. There are wide roads connecting it to four gates, one in each cardinal direction. It would be difficult to get lost here—impossible, even, especially with the mini-map to guide me.

The center square is filled with similarly dressed people. There are loads of players, many in their initial equipment or in slightly nicer sets bought from the NPC residents.

Of course, my dress stands out in the middle of it all, but the eyes gather on my chest regardless of what I wear, so it's a bit late for that. That seems to be the original intent behind the design, anyway. Guess I'll just live with it.

Anyway, err...the portal. Apparently, I'm supposed to touch the water in the fountain, which is bursting from a gallant statue at the very center of the square. I dip a finger into it.

The portal to the starting town has been opened.

You can set this location as your respawn point.

Yeah, I should probably just set it here at this point: no need to go back "home" to the catacombs.

You have set your respawn point.

TUTORIAL: "Let's Open the Portal" is complete!

You have received the following as a reward: Beginner's HP Potions, Beginner's MP Potions TUTORIAL: "Let's Register as an Adventurer" has been generated.

Looks like I got five HP Potion and MP Potions—not that I can use them. Oh, a note was added to the help menu.

ABOUT PORTALS

A statue of the great Stellura is necessary to generate a portal. These statues may vary from town to town, but you will always find one in the center. Make sure to unlock the portal whenever you reach a new town.

If the portal to another town is unlocked, you will see Stellura's symbol. It functions as both the gate and key. By touching it, you will be able to teleport to the portals in other towns. This function can only be used by outsiders; it is inaccessible to residents.

So this is a statue of the goddess Stellura. As for the next tutorial...ah, the adventurers' union is right over here.

I follow the mini-map down the eastern road, and it isn't long before a large building catches my eye. The sign board is emblazoned with a sword and shield, while the map has it labeled as the Adventurers' Union. Everyone leaving is armed to the teeth.

I see two colors of markers: It seems like both blue players and green NPC residents are coming and going from its halls. I rush into the building—ignoring the stares—and scan for the counter at the front. There's an available receptionist, so I don't have to wait.

"Welcome to the Adventurers' Union. Are you here to post a new quest?"

"No, I'd like to register with the union."

"You want to register...?" The receptionist looked confused, most likely because of my unique clothing.

“Yes, I’d like to register.”

“Understood. Then let’s take care of your registration. Touch that crystal, please.”

After glancing around, her eyes settle on the sword at my waist, and she seems to come to terms with my request. Perhaps she originally took me for some noble lady and was looking for my attendant. But progress is progress. I follow her instructions and receive a simple explanation of the union.

There are seven ranks overall: F, E, D, C, B, A, and S. There are no restrictions on what quests you can take, but you have to pay a penalty if you fail. I get a free union ID card from the jump; I can have another printed if I lose it, but that will cost a decent sum of money, and the sum increases with each reissue. Well, to us outsiders—that is, us players—it’s treated as a key item, so we can’t lose it even if we try.

Quests can be posted on the quest board. Reports must be brought to the desk, and the rewards can either be accepted on-site or added to a card. Withdrawals can be conducted at the union. You can entrust money to the union too; it seems to serve as a bank as well.

The final important point is that adventurers have a duty to report any oddities in town to the union. The union will send a team to investigate and, depending on what happens, you can receive a reward simply for reporting it.

Sometimes adventurers are sent to investigate, and the union will choose suitable adventurers by rank. If you want to participate in investigations, you’ll want to increase your rank.

“That’s everything. Do you have any questions?”

“No, I’m fine.”

“Then here is your union card. I speak for all of us when I say the union is looking forward to seeing what you accomplish.”

TUTORIAL: “Let’s Register as an Adventurer” complete!

You have received the following as a reward: Beginner’s HP Potions,

Beginner's MP Potions

More unusable potions for me...hooray. I lower my head in a polite bow to the receptionist, then head straight to the quest board. There's quite an array of posted quests and each type determined by a color.

RED: Hunt GREEN: Escort BLUE: Gather or Deliver YELLOW: Investigate

Hunt and Gather are standard quests, but taking on an Escort or Investigation quest would be harsh without the necessary skills. There are quite a few hunting quests listed here. The targets are probably monsters that appear around town, and I wouldn't mind taking some on. But first, I'd like to walk around town.

Oh, come to think of it, there's a skill I should be able to pick up from the union. I shift away from the quest board and take a peek at the official bulletin board. I once again look over the skills recommended for all players. I need to listen to the wisdom of my predecessors—i.e. the beta tests. At least, that's what my sister said.

SCORE: MUST HAVES

Appraisal, Identify

They're a real pain to unlock if you don't select them as initial skills. At the very least, make sure to pick up Appraisal.

SCORE: RECOMMENDED

Discern, Dismantle

You get better drops, so they're totally worth it.

SCORE: WOULDN'T HURT TO HAVE

Gather, Mine, Log

You can earn some easy pocket change just by picking things up along the way. Some crafters offer a discount if you provide the materials.

I already took Appraisal and Identify. Discern raises the chances of receiving a higher quality or rarer drop. Dismantle makes it so a dead monster's body remains after a fight—and you can stick a dismantling knife in to get more items. You get more drops than usual, but it takes time. As with other production skills, you can also manually dissect things, but you'll see Hell itself in the gory process. You'll definitely need Laundry, the skill from getting Magic Assist to level 10. Why? For the blood of course. Between Discern and Dismantle, I'd like both if I can get them—not that I'm interested in manual dissection.

Gather, Mine, and Log are exactly what you'd expect. Personally, I'd like Gather and Mine at least. Mine gets you ore, Log gets you lumber, and Gather is for collecting everything else.

They teach Discern and Dismantle here at the union facility. For Gather, just start picking things up off the side of the road and you'll gain the ability naturally. Log and Mine need special tools—a pickaxe and woodcutter's axe, respectively.

Which means I can stick to learning Discern and Dismantle while I'm here. Or at least, that was my intention—my alarm goes off. Time to get ready for bed.

The catacombs were farther away from town than I'd expected. The walk took too long—or maybe I'm just slow. It's Friday, so there's no need to go to bed early, but I can just take care of it tomorrow morning.

I return to the square and log out. I'll learn some new skills next time I log in.

Chapter 7:

Saturday Morning

WHEN I LOG IN the next day, I find myself in the same town square where I'd logged out. I immediately head for the union.

I told the receptionist the skills I wanted, and she let me know where to go. The place I'm destined for isn't far; in fact, it's just the lot next door. It's designed like a courtyard with several stands scattered around. The dubious dark red stains marring each stand is, well, yes...you get it. It's that sort of place.

I see a well-built man standing around, so I decide to approach him. "Pardon me. Do you have a moment?"

"Hmm? Yeah, what do you need?"

"I want to learn Discern and Dismantle?"

"You, little missy? I don't mind teaching you those skills, but..."

"I may look like this, but please know that I'm an outsider. You don't need to worry about my standing or anything."

"Oh, that's right. I thought you were from some well-to-do place. Now you won't mind me being harsh with you, will you?"

"My name is Anastasia. Please do what you must."

"I'm Craig. Nice to meet you, little missy."

From there, Craig proceeded to teach me Discern and Dismantle though he kept calling me "little missy" to the end. Thankfully, I wasn't too bothered by it.

Your efforts have unlocked the Discern skill!

Your efforts have unlocked the Dismantle skill!

"Should I get a dismantling knife from the blacksmith?"

“Sounds like a solid plan, though you can find them at the general store too. But there’s a shortage on goods now, so you might be out of luck.”

“Are you talking about the influx of outsiders? I only just arrived here yesterday. Is it serious?”

“...Little missy, does that mean you’re not exactly *human*?”

“Yes, it took a while to reach town.”

“You look human enough to me. Anyway, yeah, it’s pretty serious, though...*sigh*. I tell you, when our little monster missy here’s so well behaved, the world really must be upside down. Then again, I guess you’re a human in the world you come from.”

As far as the resident NPCs were concerned, we players were visitors from another world—otherwise known as Outsiders. A revelation from the gods of this world ensured that every NPC knew about the outsiders. At least, that was what was written on the official site.

“I like the polite ones, like you. They’re not a problem. But the badly behaved ones tend to stand out. The goddess said I have to treat them nicely. My apologies to her, but I’m starting to consider banning them from my shop.”

“I see. You were doing just fine without us not too long ago. So you can still do business fine without us as well.”

“Right. All the shops here in town, we’ve been operating for a while now.”

“So you don’t need the new business. But you’re not going to ban all outsiders, right? I doubt those rabblers will listen to what you have to say, in any case.”

“Hmm...”

“Oh, will there be any problem with refusing customers?”

“The shop’s door is a magic item. You’re forced out the moment you’re banned, and you can’t go back in. It’s all good, little missy.”

“That’s convenient. Then they’re getting their just deserts. I say follow your gut. Plenty of people are banned from shops in our world too.”

This game is an RPG, for what it's worth. It feels natural to converse with the residents, and even more natural to treat them like they're people. According to the official announcements, the NPCs run on a high-level AI, and you can interact with them without feeling any dissonance. They live as residents of the world, and it is recommended to treat them as such.

Additionally, FLFO is a roleplaying game. You should do your part and play the role. If you decide to be violent, you should accept the consequences of your actions. The NPCs are simply acting out their own character settings. Anyone who knows about or has played a TTRPG before wouldn't feel anything strange about the NPCs taking action based on what happens to them.

"I know the goddess told me, but if they keep causing trouble, what else can I do? My hands are tied."

"Come to think of it, I don't know anything about the gods of this world. Is there anywhere I can learn? I'd prefer a library, if there's one in town."

"If you want to learn about the goddesses, we have a huge church."

"I am a member of the undead. Can I go inside a church?"

"I see. You'd better not, then. In fact, you should stay off their property altogether."

"Will I be targeted?"

"Probably not, but the problem is the church itself. You'll be purified if you get too close."

"So the problem isn't with the sisters but with the location itself."

"In a nutshell. They won't attack you just because you're an undead. Not you, at least. They might purify the poorly behaved undead though."

"Well, that's more than deserved."

"So that means you need the library for sure. It's the largeish building in the western residential district. A bit off the main road—"

Your mini-map has been updated.

Oh, interesting. It's showing me the route to the library. It would be hard to lose my way like this.

"Thank you. I'll check it out later."

"You do that. If you're choosing a god to study, I'd recommend Stellura."

"Stellura? The one from the statue in the square?"

"That's right. Stellura governs light and dark, life and death, as well as time, space, and even fate. She's the right pick for an undead to follow. Go have a read-through and see what you think."

If she governs life and death, wouldn't she hate the undead that defy both? Maybe I'm looking at it the wrong way. I'm quite curious, so let's go and read some stories about the gods. Perhaps I should call it this world's lore.

I can understand time, space, and fate as part of Stellura's lore. That's why she's used for teleportation portals, and why her symbol is the gate and key, I assume.

"Come to think of it, and backtracking a bit...are cooking tools also in short supply? I'd like tools for Cooking and Alchemy."

"Cooking supplies, eh? You should be able to get those just fine. From the union, go down the main road, and down—"

Your mini-map has been updated.

"It's a general store run by a nice old lady. The townsfolk drop by a lot."

"Are you sure you should be telling me?"

"Don't tell anyone else. Once you're in, pass my name to the old lady. You need to be approved to enter, but once you get the go-ahead, she'll help you out."

"Thank you so much. Potions are pointless to me, so I won't be visiting the store too frequently. Also, you can only get in if someone tells you about it,

hmm? Is it a secret?"

"Something like that. They're using a special door over there."

So it's more like a trigger: The entrance is flagged when another resident tells you about it. I'd imagine there are other secret shops like this all over the server. But talking to NPCs is quite fundamental to an RPG, so it's not *that* much of a secret. Anyway, I just need some cooking and alchemy supplies and a dismantling knife, so I'm happy to have the information.

Ah, it looks like someone else has arrived, so I'll be taking my leave.

"I'll be off then. Thank you for everything."

"Take care, little missy!"

Before I'm too far from the union, I'll take a quest to hunt some wolves and rabbits nearby. Then I'll head to the forest via the east gate this time. The east is home to animal-type monsters with high endurance, but there aren't too many of them, and the forests are easy to navigate.

Apparently, you can run into brown boars, brown deer, and brown bears. I'll take a quest for them too. All right, now on to shopping!

According to the map marker, the shop is over in this direction. It looks like there's lots of random stuff inside, so this must be the place. I step right in and see a granny sitting at the counter.

"Oh, a new face."

"I heard about this place from Mr. Craig at the union."

"I see. So, what can I do for you?"

"I'm looking for cooking and alchemy equipment, as well as a dismantling knife."

"Cooking, alchemy, and the knife. They're 3,000 each."

So 9,000 total... *Oof*, that's cutting it close. I lost all my starting money from the penalty for dying to that sword over and over again, but I still have that bonus I have yet to claim. The bonus gives me 10,000, so I just barely have enough money.

Let me tell you, I may be dressed like a noble lady, but I'm as broke as a commoner. Anyway, I purchase all three.

[TOOL] BEGINNER'S COOKING SET

Rarity: NO Quality: C

A set containing all the tools a novice cook might need to get started on their culinary adventures.

[TOOL] BEGINNER'S ALCHEMY SET

Rarity: NO Quality: C

A set containing all the tools a novice alchemist might need to get started with synthesizing.

[TOOL] DISMANTLING KNIFE

Rarity: NO Quality: C Durability: 100

A basic knife used for dismantling.

Drop increase: Minor

A copper pickaxe costs 600 gold; looks like for now, I'll have to pass. Let's come back once I have a bit of wiggle room in the budget.

I tell the granny—er, the shopkeeper—I'll be back. Now, before I head off hunting, let's get some skills.

Thanks to my evolution and rebuild, I have 34 skill points to allocate. It shouldn't be an issue.

Using 12 points, I learn Cooking, Alchemy, Discern, and Dismantle. That leaves me with a generous 22.

Oh dear, I don't have a sheath for the dismantling knife. A normal leather one wouldn't go with my dress, anyway. I guess I'll have to keep it in my pouch. It's

like a shortcut to my inventory anyway—plus, it doesn't clash.

Now, off we go. Eastern forest ho! The library can wait for another time.

I proceed straight down the eastern road and step out into the plains beyond the gate. Let's kill us some rabbits and wolves on the way to the forest. Also, I'd like to test a skill I haven't used before. Hmm, the only one that fits the bill is Dark Magic. All right, I'll focus on using that skill today.

I one-shot a rabbit with Dark Ball and stab the dismantling knife into it. Rinse, wash, and repeat! It's busywork, to be honest, but that was what I was expecting. I'll just keep at it for a bit.

Dark Magic has reached Level 5.

Acquired Dark Magic spell: Dark Heal

Oh, that was fast. It looks like the elementary magic trees have the same general skills at the same levels: Basically, they all get healing at Level 5, then arrow at level 10. The early players found that out during the beta. But even if they're learned at the same levels, there are some differences apparently; just like with Automatic HP Regen, I think I'm receiving a bonus to my Dark Magic learning speed. The all-important difference between attributes is still being researched, though. Well, as long as my levels keep going up, I'm not complaining.

I continue on my way through the forest, defeating rabbits with my rapier and dark magic. Soon, wolves join the mix, but they're also down in one hit thanks to my handy-dandy skill. My highest stat is intelligence, and High Undead gives a bonus to dark magic, so enemies from the starting zone are nothing to me. Not to mention they're all two-to-six levels below me. So easy fights are to be expected.

The rabbits don't attack; they run away if you get too close, but there are a few brave ones that rise to the challenge. It's a pain to chase the running ones—or rather, my low agility means I'm forced to abandon them. My real aim is in the forest, in any case.

The wolf AI is far better structured than the rabbit AI. The wolves leap and try to push you down; they'll aim for your ankles, they'll cling to you, and they'll circle around you while growling.

The rabbits just try to headbutt you—when they even attack at all.

However, a wolf on the offensive is easily finished with one thrust of my rapier. I take my knife from my pouch and touch it to the beast, converting it into light and droppable items.

Darn, just one wolf meat. The skill level's pretty low.

Based on what was learned in the beta, drops do change a bit depending on how you take down the enemy. I can understand they were going for realism, but that also restricts your battle style. It's a mixed bag, though I think it's ultimately an interesting idea. You wouldn't want battle to become too monotonous.

Any enemy that comes at me, I deal with at close range. The ones slightly farther away, I dispatch with magic. I begin to alternate magic skills so I can level my skills equally.

In this game, techniques use the same MP that magic does. Although there's no bar to display it, there's also apparently a stamina system. Fighting, running, and moving around for too long will properly tire you out. However, the undead know no fatigue. It's quite nice, excluding the whole "sun burning my skin" thing. It took two weeks to reach this point, but now? I can take it easy now.

Sword has reached Level 10. You have earned 1 Skill Point.

Acquired Sword Art: Distance Sword

Hmm...? Distance Sword is a ranged attack where you fire a slash at the enemy. Nice and simple!

The wolves drop meat, pelts, and claws. The rabbits drop just meat. I only have plans for the meat, in any case, so the rest is bonus. The pelts and claws will be sold straight to the union; I only have 1,000 gold, after all. It's a sad fact

of life, but I'll get a bit more when I report back on my hunting quests.

Luckily, my race doesn't need food, so I don't need to listen to my stomach. My equipment has no endurance, so I don't have to maintain it either, and I can sell all materials besides what I need for cooking and alchemy. Even potions are useless to the undead.

Saving money should be easy for me.

Now then, with one backward glance at the other players camping out and fighting in the plains, I arrive at the eastern forest. I'll start hunting and gathering right away.

There are more herbs here than I expected. They're more like weeds than helpful plants, if I'm being honest.

[MATERIAL] MEDICINAL HERB

Rarity: NO Quality: E– A magic herb with healing properties. They grow all over the place.

Erk, the quality is E-minus. Was I wrong to dismantle it with my knife? Or is the incredibly low grade because I don't have Gather yet? Maybe it's both. Well, let's just hope I get some better quality herbs eventually.

[INGREDIENT] ZOOMISHROOM

Rarity: NO Quality: E– A mushroom that makes you energetic if you eat it. Often given to people with colds.

[MATERIAL] SHADISHROOM

Rarity: NO Quality: E– A poisonous mushroom that will temporarily paralyze whoever ingests it.

Yes, it's a forest, all right. I came to hunt, but instead I'm foraging the local flora; I just get the urge to pick up everything I see. Strangely, I'm not seeing any enemies. I'm able to wander around with the dismantling knife in hand, no problem.

Your efforts have unlocked the Gather skill!

Let's get it right away. My skill points go down from 23 to an even 20. When I pick up the nearest herb, its quality is listed as E: an upgrade from just moments ago. The market standard is C, so it's still rather dubious, but I'm sure the quality will go up with practice. It's only been two weeks so far. There's no need to rush things.

I came to the eastern forest because the drops here go for a lot, but maybe I should have headed South. There's no way I can grow my combat skills without any enemies to test them against. Perhaps it would have been faster to go after the swarms of goblins. Oh, finally, here's one!

BROWN BOAR LV 16

Be careful; these vicious beasts charge as soon as they see an enemy. Their materials fetch a pretty penny—for those who can defeat them.

Attribute: —

Weakness: —

Resists: —

Genus: Animal

Species: Boar

Status: Normal

Oh my, what a big piggy you are!

Come to think of it, I've never actually seen a boar before, but I imagine they have to be smaller than this IRL. It comes up to my chest; that's waaay too big for reality.

Well, I'm still going to fight it, especially since it took so long to find. According to Detect, its bottom and legs are its weak point. As it's a living thing, the neck and chest probably are too, but I can't see them from this position. I should be fine if I think of it as a wolf.

I tuck my knife away and blast a Light Arrow at its behind, not forgetting to turn Dark Aura on. Arrow spells fly faster than Ball spells and they can pierce, but they do less damage on impact. Arrows are more effective when targeting a weak point, though. I think it might have to do with collision detection.

If I hit the boar's weak point, the strength of the impact won't really matter. I got Detect for a reason; I should use it and aim well. I fire the Light Arrow straight from the tip of my sword. My sure strike drops the boar's HP by 60 percent.

"Pigyuaaaaaa!!!" It cries out as it looks towards me with bloodshot eyes. No, I won't let you join my party. No way, no how, big piggy!

After stepping out of the way of its charge, I stick my blade out with the honed edge facing the beast. As it passes, I feel like I'm almost dragged along with it, but I manage to defeat it as expected. All that's left is to stab it with the dismantling knife.

[INGREDIENT] BROWN BOAR MEAT

Rarity: NO Quality: C

The meat of a brown boar. It has a somewhat peculiar taste and should be processed before cooking.

[MATERIAL] BROWN BOAR HIDE

Rarity: NO Quality: C

A brown boar's hide. Although it has solid defense and durability, it is a little

heavy.

Oh, I got two drops! Things are looking up for me...wait. No, I got three. Two pieces of boar meat came out. Still, am I really that weak? I guess it's normal for a young woman to lose in a strength contest with a charging boar...and my race lacks physical strength too. I'll need to use my head next time.

One more thing: This body's sense of balance is *bad*. The system's movement assist corrects my posture, but that's all it does—corrects, not enhances. I think I actually move better in real life.

Which means I'll have to start stretching here too. And I don't want to do my stretches in the town square, so I'll need a room at the inn. Ooh, that's smart! I can limber up in my rented room every night before I log out. I'll be doing it again *after* logging out, but I don't mind the repetition.

The official site said that strength training IRL does have some effect, so maybe core training helps in-game too. At least, that's what I'd like to believe. Time flows a lot faster here, so it should bear fruit in no time.

For the time being, I'll hunt only as much as my quests demand. I'll need a few more enemies for that, so let's try elsewhere. The boar was at Level 16. It honestly had quite a bit of endurance; I'd put it around the same as a high zombie. It had the same level too, come to think of it. Both undead and animals have high stamina. However, the HP regen makes the undead much more of a hassle to deal with.

BROWN DEER LV 15

The larger their antlers, the stronger they are. Said splendid antlers fetch a nice price on the market.

Attribute: —

Weakness: —

Resists: —

Genus: Animal

Species: Deer

Status: Normal

A large deer with large antlers...yeah, that's what it is. Its face is at about the same level as mine. I'll use the same tactic as with the brown boar. An attack with Dark Ball sends its HP bar into the red. As it charges at me with its antlers, I dodge and end it with another attack.

[MATERIAL] BROWN DEER ANTLER

Rarity: NO Quality: C

The antler of a brown deer. Sharp and light. Easy to process.

Only one antler. Tragic—I'd much prefer a pair.

Are there any other boars around? I want to try something out. The mini-map doesn't give me any info on my enemies' locations, and Perception doesn't seem to be reacting. I proceed a bit further, and eventually, my Perception picks up a boar. I get right to experimenting.

Just as before, I lure it in with Dark Ball. Yes, I'm doing a bit too much damage for just luring a monster my way, but let's not worry about that. I just need it to keep coming towards me.

This time, I concentrate on the Parry skill and have the sword blade slide as it passes. A single red line—an aftereffect—remains on the boar's flank as it falls to the ground.

The knife goes in and the materials come out; this time, I get two chunks of meat. Maybe it's because the Boar itself is so darn massive. Anyway, my experiment was a success. I lost out when I tried to put up a physical resistance. Why do that when I can just switch to Parry and use my dexterity stat instead?

Up until this point, I've been switching between Defend and Parry, but thinking about it now, Parry is a lot easier to use. My strength is low and my

dexterity is high, so it really should be my focus.

But Defend is still an option, so I should keep leveling it so I have it when I need it. I'll keep using Defend on weaker enemies, but if my foe's too difficult, I'll use Parry instead to balance things out.

I already hunted enough rabbits and wolves to complete my quest. All that's left is deer, boars, and bears, who all live in these woods. My only real concern is whether I'll stain my skirt hem while I'm picking herbs.

Can you actually believe that they implemented *staining* in this game? Not that I have much to worry about with the Laundry spell, but still! That said, Laundry is a convenient magic skill that cleanses not just my clothes but my body too. I'd love to have it IRL.

Magic Assist has reached Level 15.

Acquired Magic Assist abilities: Meditation, Magia Trace

Dark Aura has reached Level 5.

It's not just my magic. Even my rapier attacks raise Magic Assist, so the skill level's going up quite a bit. Close-range attacks also raise Dark Aura. It's delightful!

Now then, I'm hearing an unfamiliar whirring sound effect. What could it be...?

Oh, that must be the sound indicating that Meditation is active. I don't feel anything restricting my movements, though. Let's see...Meditation raises your MP recovery rate. You're also unable to move while it's active. Meanwhile, Magia Trace is a duplicate of my race skill—the one that lets me see magic energy. It's useless to me.

You know, come to think of it, I still haven't seen a bear. Should I head further into the forest?

You have entered a safe zone.

Oh...? The map color changed.

ABOUT SAFE ZONES

Safe zones are areas in the wilderness that act the same as towns. Monsters do not appear, and your automatic recovery rate rises just as it would in town. You can safely log out in these areas.

Well, that's pretty much what I thought a safe zone would be. It's noon, in any case, so let's log out and eat lunch.

Chapter 8:

Saturday Afternoon

“YOU HAVE ANY afternoon plans, Sis?”

“For now, I want to do some union quests and work on raising my level.”

“Right, you were in the catacombs for a while.”

“Yeah, my skills got pretty unbalanced fighting zombies.”

“What are you focusing on?”

“Ah, combat skills in general.”

“You use a one-handed sword, right?”

“It’s a rapier. Also, I use Light Magic and Dark Magic.”

“Oh, so that was a rapier. And you got Light Magic too?”

“I thought I couldn’t use it, but there it was on the initial skill list.”

“Yeah, that one’s a mystery, ain’t it?”

For some reason, demon players can’t take Light Magic, but undead players can. However, as the undead have low intelligence, they’re not the best spellcasters. zombies don’t even have any MP to use! Though apparently Ghosts are the best for a magic build.

That said, undead players can pick up Dark Magic as one of their race skills. Though there are other magic skills on the initial skill list, if you try to unlock them normally, they usually cost a lot of points. It’s not just Light—the other four elements are quite costly. Why is the system like this? That’s another mystery.

Demons have Dark attributes right from the start. That’s one of their initial race skills, and as a result, they fundamentally cannot learn light. They can pick up the other four attributes for the average value of three points though.

This mystery seems like it has something to do with the gods—perhaps

Stellura, who governs light and dark. I'll need to do a bit more reading into the matter.

"If demons exist, then angels should exist too. Some of the fanbase is getting excited about that."

"Oh, Angels, right? Would their final form be Seraph or something?"

"I'd expect so. You could fit all the nine tiers in with an evolution every ten levels."

"The problem is that no one knows how to become an Angel."

"True, true."

"Plus, they're the mortal enemy of zombies like me..."

"In essence, yeah. Come to think of it, you need to be careful around Light Magic, okay?"

"I know. It's got a 4× damage multiplier."

"No, I mean when you use it too."

"Huh?"

"There's a spell called Light Burst that targets a circle with you at the center. Apparently, when an undead uses it, they get hit too. So watch out..."

"Seriously...?" I'm not confident I can withstand my own firepower. My equipment may have high magic defense, but against a 4× multiplier, my garb is hopeless. Apparently, these self-targeting hazards are a weakness specifically for inhuman players who started off with elemental attributes. The human races don't have to worry about them.

"Where are you hunting?"

"The eastern forest."

"Wait, you're soloing, right?"

"Of course I am. I got to town just yesterday, *and* I have no friends."

"How's all that going?"

"Not very well. There just aren't enough enemies for me. My quest is done as

soon as I defeat a bear, and I think I'll head south after that."

"So you're not having any problems beating them?"

"They're like high zombies, just a bit more agile. To be honest, the living dead put up more of a fight."

"I'm surprised you managed to defeat any living dead."

"I cast Light Ball at the end of my weapon and stab from behind. Works without fail!"

"Ah, the 4× multiplier boost with the sneak attack bonus on top of it."

That was an example of a tactic that was too successful. The only skills that level up when I use that method are Sword and Light Magic. More importantly, I spent so long in the catacombs I'd like to avoid them for a while. That place is only good for EXP. There's no fun to be had.

Oh, that's right, there is one important thing I should tell my sister.

"By the way, someone from the union told me there are some bad-mannered folks roaming around."

"Hmm? Well, yeah, I guess so..."

"We talked about having them banned."

"From the shops?"

"Yeah, from the shops. Apparently, the store doors are magic items. A ban means you can't enter and you'll be forcefully kicked out if you're inside when the ban comes down."

"I never thought you could get banned from an NPC's shop..."

"It's their fault for believing this game is the same as all the others. We can hold a normal conversation with these NPCs, and the official site said to treat them like humans."

"I see..."

"Incidentally, I recommended the banning. The shops were running in town before we even came. There shouldn't be an issue if they ban the newcomers."

“You have a point there. I guess they deserve it too if they’re acting up. I just worry that they might ban outsiders as a whole. Maybe we should hold a survey on the forums.”

“Delinquents get kicked out of stores in our world all the time. What’s the problem?”

“Touché. I guess I’ll just spread the message to my friends...”

At this point, I’m more worried that the shopkeepers will finally lose their patience with us players and ban everyone regardless of behavior. We need to remove the troublesome players before it gets to that point. With that matter off the table, we clean our plates and head off to game. I log in at the safe zone in the eastern forest.

Akina told me that the spawn rate increases further in, so I might want to hunker down and grind here in the woods depending on how many enemies there are. If there aren’t enough for me, I’ll try going south. But the materials from the east fetch the most money, and this is the highest level zone around the starting town. If possible, I want to hunt here.

You have fulfilled the conditions to unlock the title: Mild Princess You have fulfilled the conditions to unlock the title: Elegant Princess Title: Elegant Princess has fused with an existing title.

Oh? A new title. Sweet! Do tell, system!

MILD PRINCESS

A title given to a quiet, mild-mannered princess. Improves others’ impression of you.

ELEGANT PRINCESS

A title given to an elegant, graceful princess. Improves the impression that

royalty and nobility have of you but will reflexively put commoners on guard.

PRINCESS OF PEACE AND ELEGANCE

A title given to a majestic and refined princess. Improves others' impression of you and makes them less wary in your presence.

I see, so it's the sort of effect that makes it easier to build relationships with NPCs. The condition for Mild Princess is apparently *"Do not make any sound over a certain decibel level for a span of three days."* Meanwhile, Elegant Princess requires *"Maintain good posture and don't run for three days."* I guess I followed both, now that I think about it. With the titles fused, it looks like their effects have increased.

Three days would be my total IRL login time; if it were game days, I would have probably earned all this faster. That means I have around 72 hours of playtime. Hmm, that's quite a bit. Granted, it's not affecting my normal everyday life, so I'm sure it's fine.

Putting the three days aside, isn't it quite harsh to ask someone not to *run*? Then again, I was unable to run while I was a zombie, and after that, I didn't want my dress flapping all over the place—but I was in a very unusual situation.

Well, let's just move on.

I head further into the forest, probing for enemies with Perception while gathering every material I see along the way.

BROWN BEAR LV 17 — ACTIVE

Shows no mercy to those that enter its territory. Playing dead will just get you eaten, so don't even try it.

Attribute: —

Weakness: —

Resists: —

Genus: Animal

Species: Bear

Status: Normal

There he is. Finally...we meet face-to-face. So, playing dead gets you eaten: Guess this beary good guy will eat fresh meat if it drops right onto his dinner plate. According to Akina, bears only appear further into the forest. His weak points are naturally his neck and chest, as well as the limbs, just like boars and deer.

Let's ready magic as per usual. I want to raise my dark magic skills, so I'll go with Dark Ball.

"Grrrrraaah!" Once the magic collides with the creature, the bear gracefully stands on its hind legs and roars at me. He's not at all like that cartoon bear with the picnic basket; this monster has the impact of a real-life bear.

After charging at me on all fours, the bear takes a swipe at me with his right arm. I have no choice but to take the attack head-on. The creature hits, and I'm knocked back with a terribly loud thud. I haven't had my guard breached since I fought the living dead. This bear's Strength stat must be rather high.

As I slide along the dirt, I avoid its follow-up claw attack and end it with a rapier slash to the throat.

Defend has reached Level 10. You have earned 1 Skill Point.

Acquired Defend Art: Defend Sense

Parry has reached Level 10. You have earned 1 Skill Point.

Acquired Parry Art: Parry Sense

I stab the dismantling knife in and check the drops.

[INGREDIENT] BROWN BEAR MEAT

Rarity: NO Quality: C

The meat of a brown bear. It's actually quite a succulent feast. Most often eaten in hot pot dishes.

A bear hot pot? The thought never occurred to me. Also, this time, I got three chunks of meat. Are drops fixed for each enemy, or does it depend on their size...? Well, guess I'll know if I defeat enough of them.

Still, that was some offensive power behind its lunges. It managed to take out just shy of 10 percent of my HP—thankfully, I recover it quickly. Would it perhaps be easier if instead of baiting these monsters, I just started off with close combat? I could fire off my magic from point blank too.

Now, to check out my new arts. They're both passives that make it easier to block or parry. Since they're passive skills, I don't really have to worry about them. But I made quite a jarring sound when I defended myself. I'm glad I got my new titles before that.

Just how much sound is the limit, I wonder? Over these two weeks, I've only spoken with a few NPCs and through whisper chat with Akina. I didn't talk to anyone else. As for combat. I just slashed at zombies with a sword. I was fairly quiet—then again, I had no one to talk to.

As for the princess part, that's probably just because of my race. No further comments necessary.

Oh my, Perception is reacting. Let's continue the hunt.

Your Race Level has increased!

Dark Magic has reached Level 10. You have earned 1 Skill Point.

Acquired Dark Magic spell: Dark Arrow

All right, that's three bears down! Let's head back to report my results. After

some trial and error, I've concluded that the meat drops are related to enemy size. The rabbits and wolves only gave one each, after all.

There are certainly more adventurers further in. Maybe they can take their time and head back later, but...right now, my sluggish movement speed is causing me a lot of trouble. Let's just go back for now.

I turned off the notification for skills without arts, but they seem to be rising steadily. I'm thinking it's about time for me to dive into production skills.

Finally back in town. My movement really is my bottleneck—I'm just so darn slow. Maybe I should consider buying one of those carriages? Or maybe just the horse itself. Hmm, is there a riding skill? There's got to be one. Akina told me all about horse players, after all.

But it's going to be impossible to obtain a horse this early in the game. I only have 1,000 gold. I'm guessing they cost a bit of money to maintain too. Yes, I highly doubt my issues are going to be resolved immediately.

Let's just head right on in—

Bwah, wait, what?! There it is, in the "flesh"...a race just as unpopular as zombies! It's a sexy radish!!

The radish creature is in the center of a circle of rabbits, and they're all gnawing on it—how pitiful, this thing might have it even harsher than zombies! At least, its mortal enemies are much worse to deal with than mine. I think, in terms of appearance—and in regard to my mental health as a gamer—I had it harsher at first.

Members of the Sexy Radish race look like Japanese Daikon: the kind of big, white radish where the tip splits into two leg-like protrusions. They've also got leaves on their heads.

Wow, it...really is just a moving daikon. How surreal. Though...I have to admit, I don't hate that sort of thing. I was actually considering picking being one of those over being a zombie. Oh, those vines...! I think that must be their race skill, Plant Magic. Green vines wrap around the rabbit gnawing on it, and the radish begins kicking it with its short legs.

On a side note, the rabbit AI seems to work differently against their vegetable foes. They're not headbutting like they did me; they're all full-on gnawing at the radish. None of them are running away either. Well, it's a daikon, after all—it must be like eating a tasty carrot. The HP and MP lost from the biting and the Plant Magic is restored through their race skill Photosynthesis, which allows them to recover as long as they bask in sunlight. It's like the opposite of me who absolutely wilts in the sun.

It doesn't look like I'll have to step in, so let's go do my own business. Whoever it is, they went out of their way to choose an inhuman race. I'm sure they look forward to these scenarios.

There aren't many of us inhuman players around. I'm sure we'll have a chance to speak eventually.

All right, now that I'm in town, there are loads of things I have to do. During combat, it's begun to occur to me that my long hair is a bit of a hindrance. There don't seem to be scrunchies in FLFO, so I'll tie my long locks back with a ribbon. Do they sell ribbons at the general store?

Also, I'll have to report to the union and process my drops... Ugh, this is an issue. I don't know the actual price of these items, and in MMOs, you generally get more by selling to players. The problem is I have no one to sell to. Maybe I should open up a stall. I can certainly see myself running a stall and delving into production, but I can't do that when I don't know the market value of things. For the time being, let's just buy a ribbon. I doubt a ribbon will go for more than 1,000...hopefully.

I head towards granny's shop.

"Hello!"

"Oh, it's you again."

"Mmm. Do you have anything I can tie my hair back with?"

"Hmm, you'll need either a ribbon or a hairpin."

"I'd prefer a ribbon please."

“That’ll be 50. You can choose the color.”

“Two navy blue ones, please.”

“You got it. That’ll be 100, then.”

I leave the shop and return to the main road. My next destination is the union, and by the time the building is in sight, I catch sight of a familiar individual emerging from the entrance. Oh, she’s doing a double take.

A silver-haired girl with leather armor and a halberd—my younger sister, Akina.

“Sis!”

Wow, she’s fast! That’s genuine Agility for you. I catch her as she rushes straight at me. As per usual, she immediately embraces me and promptly buries her face right in my cleavage.

“Ha ha ha! I can’t get enough of this!”

“Don’t talk while you’re down there...”



“You’re a bit cold, Sis...*brr!*”

“Well, I *am* an undead. You feel vaguely warm in comparison.”

My body temperature must be low due to me being well...a corpse. But it’s better than being stone cold like a block of ice. If I’m moving through magical means, there’s no reason for me to have body heat at all.

“You came at a good time. Tie my hair for me, please?”

“Sure, sure. Where do you want it tied?”

“Gather it at around the knees. I think that’ll look nice.” I hand a ribbon over to my sister.

“Oh, that’s a wicked cool sword you have...”

“Isn’t it?”

“Look out for PKers. PK’s not recommended, but some people like to experiment with banditry and all that.”

“Even if they tried, the equipment is tied to me. I can’t lose it.”

“Lucky!”

“Yeah, it’s pointless if they’re after my equipment. By the way, do you know any artisans who’d buy pelts and hides off of me?”

“Sure! I intended to introduce you anyway. Wanna go now?”

“Can it wait until I’ve reported my quests?”

“Yeah.”

“Then give me a second.”

I leave my sister behind for a moment to enter the union. Rabbit, wolf, deer, boar, bear: The payment from my hunt comes to 3,300 gold total, with a breakdown of 200, 400, 800, 900, and 1,000 gold respectively. It seems one hunt is enough to pay for one beginner’s production kit.

I’m going to be doing it all again anyway, so I accept the same quests again before I leave the union. There were a decent number of enemies further in. I can hunt there for now.

“Sorry to keep you waiting.”

“I think they’ll be at the usual spot, so let’s head south. It’s not too far from here.”

Akina leads me in a direction I’ve yet to explore—a southeast area slightly off the main road. The person I’m about to meet is presumably a top-class blacksmith; someone famous probably. I say “probably” because you can’t be so sure with games.

“Old man!”

“There you are, girlie!”

“This is my sister! Be nice to her, you hear?”

“...Is that the setting you’re going with?”

“No, she’s real.”

“Oh, so she’s *that* one.”

What does he mean, “that one”? More importantly, should I stop her from calling him an old man?

“Most beta players know she got a console for you.”

“Oh, I see. So that’s what you mean. My name is Anastasia. It’s a pleasure.”

“Yeah, pleasure. The name’s Ertz. You can find me RPing as your friendly neighborhood dwarf.”

Oh, I see. Then I guess it’s all right to call him “old man” after all.

“So you named your character Anastasia, Sis. Wow, you sure went all-in!”

“Yeah, I thought no one would notice.”

“Ah, I guess they wouldn’t, huh? I’m Akirina, by the way!” my sister proclaims.

“So you mixed your names together.”

“Wait, you’re sisters, but you’re only learning each other’s names now?”

“Sis went the inhuman route, so we only just met in-game.”

“Huh...? She looks human to me.”

“Yes, but I’m still an undead who burns in the sun.”

“Oh, seriously? I should introduce you to *them* too!”

“Them...?” I ask.

“I know two guys who’ve been playing undead characters from the beta. They’re a Ghost and a Skeleton. They’re still going for the same builds in the main game, and they’re pretty famous. They stand out, to say the least.”

“I see. I have a special evolution, but I’m from the zombie tree.”

“So you say...”

“All right, then, I’m off hunting. You look after Sis!”

“Open up the northern routes already, Akarina!”

“The golem’s still too much for me!” Akina says as she races off.

By the way, my IRL name is Tsukishina Kotone—my sister is Tsukishina Akina. The reasons for our comments—that I went all-in, and that she mixed her names together—is that we both have two names. Our mother is Japanese and our father is English, so we have a name from both of our cultures.

From our father’s ancestry, I’m Anastasia and she’s Katrina. I’m using my English name as is, while Akina fused Akina and Katrina together—Akirina, get it? Anastasia sounds like a mainstream name for this type of setting, so I don’t think anyone will realize it’s my actual name. I don’t even use that name in Japan, and only my family members and long-time friends know about it—and even then, it’s usually Nasha or Stasha when they talk to me. It’s actually refreshing to be called Anastasia for once.

For what it’s worth, I was born and raised in Japan, but I frequently visited my father’s home when I was younger, mostly over summer vacation. And yes, I can speak English.

Anyway, back to Mr. Ertz. He is a male member of the dwarf race. His hair is dark red, and his eyes are orange. He has a beard, of course, and he’s around 150 centimeters tall; he’s the perfect classic image of a dwarf.

“The north has the ore mines, right?”

“Indeed. But they’ll need to defeat the golem boss first. Until someone beats him, it’ll be rough—or more like impossible—for us production players!”

After someone beats an area boss for the first time, the boss will be weakened to make it easier for everyone else. An official announcement will apparently go out, celebrating whoever was the first to beat it—however, none of them have been beaten yet, so this information is unconfirmed.

“I heard Rina grumbling that you can’t get iron until the north opens up.”

“I’d like to grumble too. How am I supposed to work without iron?”

I pick up one of the items from his stall and appraise it.

[EQUIPMENT-WEAPON] BRONZE ESTOC

Rarity: No Quality: B-Durability: 120

A slender bronze sword suitable for novices. It has no edge, so it can only be used for stabbing. Its careful construction has raised its stats somewhat.

Crafter: Ertz

Appraisal Lv 10

ATK: △

Attack type: Stab

Affected by Skills: Rapier

Appraisal Lv 20

Critical Rate Boost: Minor

Critical Damage Boost: Minor

Ooh, a B-minus quality weapon. It’s my first time seeing something above C-grade, not counting my extra equipment. Also, it looks like those two critical modifiers are standard for rapiers. The estoc blade is sharp at the tip but has no edge, like the description said. It’s a weapon completely specialized for thrusting. Naturally, when I try to compare it to my current equipment, it shows

a red ▽ by my attack stat.

“For now, here’s a friend invite...and the list.”

The list is a function that makes trading simpler. It’s mainly used by crafters, and it’s an itemized list of the materials they’re interested in buying. The material names are lined up next to their prices. Any materials the player has on hand will light up.

If the person who made the list is nearby, you can conduct a trade straight from the menu and sell everything you have on it with the press of a single button.

The buyer still has to update the entries on it manually, but once a player has received someone’s list, the items and prices update in real time. It’s like a restaurant menu with all the information listed right on the page.

You don’t have to go through the trade menu every time, which is quite convenient. Although the game makes it possible to physically take the items out and exchange them, it’s generally either the list or the trade menu that players use.

Oh, looks like Mr. Ertz only wants the boar hide.

“What are deer antlers used for?”

“They’re for making accessories with Handicraft, I believe.”

“Oh, I see. Then I’d like to sell some boar hides.”

“Eastern materials are always welcome!”

Three bore hides sell for 200 gold apiece. Nice! I’m clearly going to make more from this than from any of my other sources of income; that must be just how high the demand is for these materials. He’s the one in the business, so I’m not going to argue with his prices. I’m sure he’ll turn a profit once he processes and sells them. That’s how production classes work.

Oh, now that I have money...

“Do blacksmiths make dismantling knives?”

“Yeah, I can make them. But anything I can make right now won’t be too

different from what the NPCs are selling, so there's no real need to have me do it."

"Which means you'll be making them sometime down the road."

"Probably. I already made one of everything, just to see what happened. Anyway, bring your knife to me when the durability gets low. It's cheaper to fix it than it is to get a new one."

"Oh, come to think of it, I've been ignoring the durability rating. I'll keep an eye on that from now on. By the way, do you sell pickaxes?"

"Course I do!"

[TOOL] BRONZE PICKAXE

Rarity: NO Quality: B– Durability: 120

A bronze pickaxe perfect for mining ore. Its careful construction makes it a little easier to use.

Crafter: Ertz

"It's yours for 1,500 gold."

"I'll take it."

"Glad to do business with you. Are you planning to try smithing or something?"

"No, I just want to dig whenever I see a mining point."

"If you're selling, sell to me! I'd love to have a regular source for ore. By the way, how's your combat? If you're good enough to get boar hides, I'd appreciate a few more."

"Yes, I don't mind. I plan to go hunting again anyway. I'll bring them if I find any."

"Glad to hear it. I can introduce you to other crafters if there's anything else you want to sell."

“I generally want to sell everything that’s not an ingredient or a material for alchemy. But I’ve only been to the east so far, so I don’t have much to sell.”

“You have Cooking and Alchemy, then?”

“Yes. I cook in real life, and Alchemy seemed perfectly fantastical.”

“I see. They’re both treated like more of a hobby in-game. Well, doesn’t matter as long as it’s fun, right? We don’t know how they’ll branch off yet.”

“Yes, if I get the option to specialize, I’ll decide based on how I feel at the time.”

“Sounds like a plan. Oh, some people might buy your food depending on the taste. The rations here are easy to find, but they taste *terrible*...”

“So the demand’s not high enough for players to start cooking, but they’d buy something if it was there.”

“Yep. The problem’s the skill point cost. Plus, field rations are dirt cheap. No one wants to waste the points when you can use ’em elsewhere, though I’m sure someone out there’s trying to start a cooking guild!”

It’s possible to set up guilds in this game. That’s one of the reasons why it’s the adventurers’ *union* rather than the adventurers’ *guild*. Residents and players can set up their own guilds there, apparently.

Perhaps there’s a quest at the union to start a guild. There’s also a housing system—though you can own houses individually rather than as a collective guild—as long as you have the money. I want to have one someday, I can’t deny that. But honestly, I can see myself only ever using a house as a base for my production.

After selling materials and talking, I realize the sky is turning red.

“Hmm, evening, eh? They should be coming out soon.”

“*They?*”

“Those two undead players I told you about.”

“Oh, right, since the sun damage starts going down around this time. I’m so used to passively taking damage that I almost didn’t notice that I’m in less

pain.”

“Jeez, you have it tough.”

“It’s not too bad. My HP Regen levels up just from the sunlight, so that’s pretty great.”

“Right, they said something about that too.”

“It’s a pain to raise it the usual way. Once you’re able to go outside, it just goes up on its own—oh, in fact, it just leveled up!”

“That regen of yours heals a fixed value every second, right?”

“It’s a race skill we get to compensate for the fact that we can’t use potions.”

As for which is better, it’s a bit of a toss-up: I don’t have to buy consumables, but I won’t be able to recover quickly from massive damage. On the other hand, I can keep my HP at almost full as long as I don’t take any big hits. I don’t have to return to town to restock on supplies either. The regen works fine against low-level foes, but I’ll need to think of something for the higher level enemies that do lots of damage at once.

I continue chatting and looking over Mr. Ertz’ wares until I hear a sharp, metallic jangling behind me.

“There you are!”

“Howdy, Ertz!”

“Is my equipment ready?”

“Yeah, I’ve been waiting for you.”

A skeleton holding a long staff and a living armor appear before me. Living armor are moving suits of full plate armor that are completely hollow. They have no face, only a shifting, blood-red light from within where the eyes would be.

The skeleton is the sort you’d typically see in a fantasy story, although their bones are dark red instead of bleached white. They might be an evolved form. Just like the living armor, they have red lights that serve as eyes in their hollow sockets. Am I the only who finds that kinda cute? Just me? Figures.



“Here’s the bastard sword you wanted.”

“Let’s have a look...”

The living armor checks their surroundings before giving it a few test swings.

“Yep, looks good!”

“Glad to hear it. Here’s your shield too.”

“Thanks! I can carry it, no issues.”

So the living armor uses a bastard sword and tower shield—making them an absolute tank of a player. Honestly, that’s kinda cool. Apparently, full plate armor in this game is too heavy to move around properly in, at least for the moment. But for a living armor player, that’s not a problem. The armor is a part of them and isn’t counted as equipment.

“So anyway, there’s someone I want to introduce to you.” Ertz begins.

“Us?” the skeleton asks.

“Yeah, that young lady over there. She’s that big sister, you know...*the one*.”

“Good day!” the living armor greets.

“H-hello...” While I’m at it, I follow my movement assist and perform a prim little curtsy. Hold up: Wouldn’t a princess usually be the one being curtsied to?

“You’re a player, right? You have a blue marker, so you must be.”

“Big sister, big sister—oh! You mean Akirina’s?”

“That I am. We were together a second ago, but she left to go hunting.”

“I see. My name’s Alfred. As you can see, I’m a living armor tank,” Alfred greets.

“And I’m Honehone. A skeleton magician, as it were!” Honehone cheerfully says.

“I’m Anastasia. I may look like this, but I’m undead. A zombie.”

“Seriously?!”

“Yes, quite seriously.” Hmm, it might be quicker to ask my sister.

"Rina, can you talk?"

"Yeah, what's up?"

"I just ran into Mr. Alfred and Mr. Honehone. Can I trust them?"

"Ah, Alf, Skelly, and the old man shouldn't be a problem. They don't go blabbing everything and mind their manners. They're good people."

"Okay, got it."

"If you want to talk in secret, you have to form a party and open a party chat."

"I'll do just that."

My sister's known them for a while, even if I'm just meeting them for the first time. I'll trust her judgment.

"My sister's given me the go-ahead, so I'll show you a bit of my stats."

"Oh, really?"

"Are you sure?"

"Well, just my race and whatnot. Nothing too confidential."

I send a party invite to Mr. Alfred, Mr. Honehone, and Mr. Ertz, and share the top part of my status screen with them. Let's see...ah, there we go.

Name: Anastasia

Race: Immortal Princess ♀ Lv 11

Attribute: Dark

Genus: High Undead

Species: Royal Zombie

Skill Points: 33

"High undead?!"

“What’s ‘royal zombie’ supposed to mean?”

“Is this a special evolution? Are you sure you should have shown us all that info?” Alfred asks.

Mr. Ertz was surprised, Mr. Honehone laughed, and Mr. Alfred looked a bit hesitant. But my sister said they’re trustworthy, so it’s all okay—and I’m sure I’ll be seeing them around.

“Hey, Alf, did you get a buff too?” Mr. Honehone asked.

“Yeah, what’s this mark here?”

“I have one too. Is it a command skill?”

“Oh, I think my race skill might be boosting your stats.” I replied.

“So it’s a race skill!”

“Oh, is it because you’re a princess?”

“That seems likely. Royalty would *definitely* have some command skills.”

“Let’s see, it’s these two.”

UNDYING ROYALTY

Boosts the abilities of undead in the party in accordance with skill level.

Reduces the damage received from undead enemies in accordance with skill level.

ROYAL PRIVILEGE

Raises all stats of party members when you are the leader. The increase depends on the user’s skill level and the party scope.

“I see; the privilege one’s definitely a command skill. Wicked!”

“They both seem race-specific.”

“So it’s exclusive to the undead. To be honest with you, we’re about the only

people who'd receive the buff."

"Yeah, the undead are pretty unpopular..." Mr. Honehone mutters.

"More like the demons and fluffy inhumans are way too popular."

"Does everyone know about extra races?"

"What's that?" Mr. Alfred asks.

Oh, so they don't know about them. The entry was added to my help menu after I unlocked it, so perhaps no one knows in the early game. It would be quicker to pull up my help menu than to try to explain. I activate my menu and share the information.

"Seriously?!" Mr. Honehone exclaims.

"Hmm, so they put something like that in the game..."

"I want to know how to get one!!"

"You can't just *ask* that..." Mr. Alfred says, scolding Mr. Honehone.

"Grrr...!"

"Unfortunately, I couldn't tell you even if I wanted to."

"Really?"

"I am the only undead princess currently. You can't obtain the evolution item anymore. And I don't think a living armor can go the princess route. You'll have to find your own extra class within your race."

"It says there are quite a few of them out there."

"Yes, I found the key item in a hidden room at my race starting point. If you two know your racial starting points, I think you might find something, though I'm not making any promises."

"Are you sure you should be offering such important information?"

"I just stumbled upon it by chance, so I don't really mind. It doesn't put me at a disadvantage, and I'm not trying to compete."

"I see. And there's no possibility of anyone overlapping with you."

"Correct. In that case, I should share this info with my inhuman comrades,

especially when they're my sister's friends, and undead to boot."

"All right, I'll get searching."

"Yep, sounds like a plan!" Honehone says.

Oh, I should also tell them about the possibility of extra equipment.

"Yeah, I was curious about that. The class even came with Extra Equipment, eh?" Mr. Ertz remarks.

"They come in a bunch of different types, but they don't break, and you can't lose them. So that's somewhat of a relief." I'll show them the entry on my help menu.

"Hmm, I see, I see. Well, it's not like you'll run into gear like that every day, so I'm not going to have to close shop over this," Mr. Ertz jokes, adding a laugh.

"For now, let's register each other as friends. Nice to meet you!"

"I'm glad we could talk, Princess!"

"Yes, it's truly a pleasure," Alfred says.

All right, now I've gotten that off my chest. These two seem rather famous, and if they find anything, they might post it on the forum. I don't want to deal with that level of attention. Perhaps I should get back to hunting already. I'm itching for a fight.

"I'm going to start searching for that exclusive race!" Mr. Honehone says.

"Yeah, I'm off as well." Mr. Alfred says.

"I'll be hunting in the east." I reply.

"Have fun!" Mr. Honehone calls.

I dissolve the party and leave Mr. Ertz's shop, slaying rabbits and wolves on my way to the forest. The timeslot changes from evening to night, and I only have the light of the moon to guide me. But I have night vision, so that's no trouble for me. Apparently, an undead's innate night vision works differently from the actual Night Vision skill—and an undead's is far superior. We are denizens of the night, after all.

Today, I'll prowl the forest until it's time for bed. I can just log out in the safe

zone for dinner. I can make my report and renew my quests whenever I go back to town. It's a pain to head back every time I kill a few monsters and complete a quest, and farming creatures for materials makes me more money than quests anyway.

Hunting is starting to become a chore. These foes move quite differently from zombies. I try to mix it up by fighting them in close quarters rather than baiting them with my magic. I do want to raise my magic skills, so let's do an even fifty-fifty split. I'll research how their legs move and try to find the best way to fight them. It's a full-dive game, so I might as well immerse myself.

It's still painful to take the charges of brown boars and brown bears head-on. That said, it's becoming increasingly easy to parry them. This must be because of my stat distribution.

Since I'm here, let's experiment with Dark Aura as well. There seems to be a check every time I make contact and additional rolls as long as I remain in contact. I can inflict poison, curse, and weaken. When I touch the enemy, my aura coils around them and inflicts ailments depending on a certain ratio and probability. But it's harder to inflict poison just with a touch; it's a lot easier when they have an open wound. I guess it works kind of like an infection.

Poison inflicts damage over time instead of all at once. Curse reduces the effects of healing items, and Weaken lowers all stats. They're all troublesome effects to have on you. And my blocking a direct attack from my opponent counts as contact. If I can inflict Weaken (6) in Player versus Player combat, that could lead right into the kill. I can keep blocking while attacking with magic.

Your Race Level has increased!

Sword has reached Level 15.

Acquired Sword Art: Ironcutter

Defend has reached Level 15.

Acquired Defend Art: Magic Guard

Parry has reached Level 15.

Acquired Defend Art: Magic Parry

Dark Aura has reached Level 10. Its effects have increased.

Ironcutter is a common defense-piercing attack. Magic Guard and Magic Parry are arts that block and divert magic, respectively. I'll parry focused attacks and defend against AoEs—that is, area of effect skills. Meanwhile, it looks like Dark Aura inflicts intensity level 2 ailments now. They're all still early game skills, so they grow quickly. Gotta love it!

I haven't run into anyone during the hunt, so how about a bit of stretch training in the safe zone? After that, I log out and do the same thing in real life before saying good night.

Official BBS 3

[Bugs] Chatting Thread 10 [Not for me]

1. Resting Adventurer

This thread is for general chatting. Please write whatever you want, but keep the rules in mind, or you'll have management breathing down your neck. Seriously. The entire thread might be deleted. Please cut me some slack.

Past threads: <http://> * * * * *

>> 980 Open a new thread, please

125. Resting Adventurer

It's been two weeks now. How's everyone spending their time?

126. Resting Adventurer

>> 125 Who's asking? You with the feds? Say hello to the FBI narc.

127. Resting Adventurer

>> 126 Give this man his ham.

128. Resting Adventurer

>> 127 Never!

129. Resting Adventurer

>> 125 I'm fluffing up big time. You got a problem with that?

130. Resting Adventurer

>> 129 We could do with more fluff in this game. We've only got rabbits and wolves, right?

131. Resting Adventurer

>> 130 Right. And deer, boars, and bears if you can handle them...

132. Resting Adventurer

>> 131 I want a bear!

133. Resting Adventurer

>> 132 They made them too realistic. They're not cute...

134. Resting Adventurer

>> 133 Isn't that cool, though?!

135. Resting Adventurer

Hey! Heeey! I really! Really...wanna...touch...those supple bobbies...

136. Resting Adventurer

>> 135 What?

137. Resting Adventurer

>> 135 What???

138. Resting Adventurer

>> 135 What??????

139. Resting Adventurer

>> 135 Hey, is this guy all right?

140. Resting Adventurer

>> 139 Clearly not

141. Resting Adventurer

>> 140 No reply. Was he banned?

142. Resting Adventurer

>> 141 Sorry, sorry. My head's clear now.

143. Resting Adventurer

>> 142 Tell me more!

144. Resting Adventurer

>> 143 So I saw this girl in a dress, and she had some serious dobonhonkeros. I'm talking massive dohoonkabhankoloos. Serious big ol' tonhongerekoozers!!!

145. Resting Adventurer

>> 144 You serious? Was she an NPC? Wait, they're called residents in this game. Was she a resident?

146. Resting Adventurer

>> 145 Nah, on closer inspection, she turned out to be a player. Gray dress and one-handed sword.

147. Resting Adventurer

>> 146 For real! So what about her face game? Hawt or not?

148. Resting Adventurer

>> 148 Supper hottie with a body. Real warm and cozy type. Gave off that neat and tidy, elegant sort of feeling.

149. Resting Adventurer

>> 148 O'rly

150. Resting Adventurer

>> 148 O'rly

151. Resting Adventurer

>> 148 O'rly

152. Resting Adventurer

>> 149-151 Are you trying to get banned for spamming?

153. Resting Adventurer

>> 148 She's at old man Ertz's place. She's a dangerous one, in a few different ways...*whew*, a sight for sore eyes.

154. Resting Adventurer

>> 153 Welcome, you've reached enlightenment!

155. Resting Adventurer

>> 153 Another sage on our hands.

156. Resting Adventurer

>> 153 Old man Ertz—oh, there?! Pray for me!

157. Resting Adventurer

>> 156 You're not getting one up on me! I'm going too!

158. Resting Adventurer

>> 157 Tsk, tsk...each and every single one of you... Fine, if you insist!

159. Resting Adventurer

>> 156-158 You're acting like you're headed off to war, but you're just going to peep at a girl.

160. Resting Adventurer

This is why some men are...

161. Resting Adventurer

>> 160 At least you didn't say *all* men...

162. Resting Adventurer

>> 161 I getcha

163. Resting Adventurer

There can't be too many girls like her out there. I probably saw her. I immediately thought, if I had a girl like that as my big sister...not that I know anything about her personality.

164. Resting Adventurer

Grrrrr, what's with that chest?! Can't she spare a little for the rest of us... The world is soooooo unfair...

165. Resting Adventurer

Who does she think she is, going around like that...!

166. Resting Adventurer

>> 164-165 Stay off that topic! It won't make anyone happy!

167. Resting Adventurer

She's the girl one-shotting rabbits and wolves, right? I get it...

168. Resting Adventurer

>> 167 She's really one-shotting them? Doesn't she use a one-handed sword?

169. Resting Adventurer

>> 168 Looks like it, but she can use magic too. She headed off to the eastern forest, so that's probably her hunting ground.

170. Resting Adventurer

That girl player in the gray dress! I thought she was a resident...

171. Resting Adventurer

>> 170 You must have your markers turned off!

172. Resting Adventurer

>> 171 It's called immersion! Deal with it!

[Another Good Day] Production: Cooking Thread 10 [With Good Food]

1. Nameless Cook

This thread is for Cooking! Talk about the Cooking skill here, and keep the other conversations elsewhere.

Past threads: http://****

General Production Thread: http://****

Caution! Boiling Knowledge and Stewing Knowledge both exist. They're different arts! Also, no food terrorism!

>> 980 See you all in the next thread!

2. Nameless Cook

Congrats for the new thread.

3. Nameless Cook

Hiya.

4. Nameless Cook

Hi. Only three posts so far...

5. Nameless Cook

Don't say it...

6. Nameless Cook

I'm just saying. Why is it so unpopular?

7. Nameless Cook

Why cook in-game when you already do it in real life? That's what people said to me...

8. Nameless Cook

Oh, I see...

9. Nameless Cook

So they won't do it unless they like cooking to begin with...

10. Nameless Cook

Field rations are dirt cheap, anyway...

11. Nameless Cook

I can't accept how unappetizing they are, though.

12. Nameless Cook

Wouldn't they have a better time if they made themselves some jerky or something?

13. Nameless Cook

Smoked foods, eh? I understand the sentiment, but that's not the issue, is it?

14. Nameless Cook

The problem is that no one sells meat. I know, I know.

15. Nameless Cook

Cooking doesn't currently offer any buffs. It just reduces hunger. You can do that with rations, so hardly anyone has the cooking skill. And since no one buys cooked meat, they sell it to the union for reliable profits instead. You need to go hunting yourself if you want any.

16. Nameless Cook

Even though the food's delicious and a slight difference in preparation does change the flavor. It makes me wonder just how much data they put into it.

17. Nameless Cook

Seriously. After one bite, I could never go back to rations...

18. Nameless Cook

The good thing about rations is that they don't take any time to eat.

19. Nameless Cook

I'm starting to think it's just that nobody knows the taste of a dish cooked by a halfway decent chef.

20. Nameless Cook

Well, it's only been two weeks since the game began and it's the first FDVRMMO, so everyone's absorbed in combat. And in that case, a field ration is the best way to relieve hunger...

21. Nameless Cook

I just want to lower my hunger bar. I don't want to waste time eating. But if I do eat, I'd prefer something tasty...I expect that's how it'll go.

22. Nameless Cook

We can't do anything about the first part, but maybe we can help with the second? The third are the people who already buy from the stalls.

23. Nameless Cook

We'll need food you can pretty much eat in one bite, then. We don't have to do anything special about the third group

24. Nameless Cook

Can't we just make jerky or smoked meat, then? There might be Smoking Knowledge, right?

25. Nameless Cook

There might be. All we know for now is that Grilling Knowledge and Cooking Wisdom kick in at Level 1, Boiling Knowledge at Level 5, Stewing Knowledge at Level 10, and Steaming Knowledge at Level 15.

26. Nameless Cook

At 20, we'll probably get a shared production class skill.

27. Nameless Cook

Right, and the real climb starts at level 15. We'll probably need to head to the eastern forest for ingredients. My levels aren't rising anymore with just rabbit and wolf.

28. Nameless Cook

Even if it's just different animal meat, you think a chef can afford ingredients from the eastern forest? It's a steep price jump.

29. Nameless Cook

Yeah, just look at the union's pricing. The union pays the minimum price for materials, and even they were buying them for over 1k.

30. Nameless Cook

But that doesn't make me a good hunter.

31. Nameless Cook

Combat? I'm a chef.

32. Nameless Cook

Err, hi, I picked up cooking. But what's food terrorism?

33. Nameless Cook

Welcome, comrade! Food terrorism is...well, it's...

34. Nameless Cook

Let's start with the basics.

1. If you fail a dish, it explodes. We don't know why.
2. You will get a burn status ailment if you stick your hand into the heat source. It is quite hot.

35. Nameless Cook

Cook nonstop as soon as you get Boiling Knowledge. Just try to keep a soup going with herbs and spices. You can handle the rest.

36. Nameless Cook

They explode...? Do you lose the ingredients?

37. Nameless Cook

Yes, and the players around you get caught in the blast. That's food terrorism.

38. Nameless Cook

Honestly, I laughed the first time I heard about it. That mistake is what taught me the difference between Stewing Knowledge and Boiling Knowledge. You can't add anything except salt for Boiling Knowledge.

39. Nameless Cook

By the way, failure here means doing something you're not allowed to. If you burn a steak, that's a failure by my books, but it just adds an "overcooked," "burnt," or "charcoal" indicator to the food, and it won't explode.

40. Nameless Cook

You can also get “undercooked” if you don’t grill it long enough. When you fail like that, you still get EXP, though less than what you’d usually get. Also, there’s no explosion.

41. Nameless Cook

I see, thank you.

42. Nameless Cook

Don’t worry about it. Let’s enjoy the chef life, eh...?

Chapter 9:

Sunday Morning

I LOG IN AT THE SAFE AREA in the eastern forest. Hmm, it looks like Mr. Ertz isn't online at this time of day. Granted, it's not even six in the morning, so that's completely understandable. Actually, there doesn't seem to be anyone around, so I'll stretch while I think about what to do today.

I have nine boar hides; that's more money than I've ever had before. I also have quite a bit of meat, so maybe I should try using my Cooking skill. That means I'll need to return to town to buy vegetables and spices. Yeah, I'll spend today on production. Let's get started!

COOKING

Grilling Knowledge, Cooking Wisdom

Knowledge: You are capable of applying this method to your cooking.

Wisdom: During manual cooking, the system will assist you by showing lines to trace over. Increases the drop rate of ingredients.

Hmm. I see. Based on this phrasing, it seems that I can only grill at the moment; or rather, I can apply grilling knowledge to my skill set. Does that mean I can't do it at all otherwise?

So you can't even grill meat without the Cooking skill? It looks like there's a deep divide between those who want to cook in any capacity and those who won't bother. It's not something you can pick up on a whim. I know that rations are cheap, so cooking isn't really necessary, but they apparently taste terrible.

All right, I can leave my stretching at that. Let's hunt and gather on the way to town.

The clock strikes six on my way back and the scene changes to morning. In short, I start to burn. I want to raise my regen, so I welcome it. I can feel my

skills growing and leveling up, which is good, because my level's far too low for this point in the game. I hear that the players who joined early are already at Level 30, so I'm only around halfway there.

Stat bonuses from skills are more significant than raising your base level, so there's not much point in grinding at the catacombs. Although the inhumans have it a bit easier thanks to their evolution.

Once I arrive in town, I first head to the union to report my quests. I take the same ones again before leaving.

There aren't many people around at this time of day, though that makes it easier to move about. Let's head to the south district to buy everything I need for cooking.

There are quite a few spice shops around here. It seems they have slightly different selections, but all I can do right now is grill. The problem is that I don't really know what to limit myself to.

You fry hash browns at the end, but you'll need to microwave, steam, or boil the potatoes before that. Even if I had Frying Knowledge, would my recipe fail if I didn't know boiling or steaming? I suspect that it would result in charred failure.

Can I consider roasting food in foil to be the same as grilling? Is pan-frying grilling...?

You know what, let's just *actually* grill some meat for now.

I buy salt and pepper. Salt is 50 gold a bag and pepper is 100. That's pretty spicy and pricey. I buy thirty of each, putting my expenses at 4500. It hurts, but each bag can cook ten dishes, so I'll be able to make three hundred meals total.

I should buy some cabbage and onion too. Both of their descriptions say they're cabbage-like or onion-like vegetables, not the real thing. It's 10 per, so I buy ten of each. I don't plan on using them yet, but that should be sufficient stock.

Now I'll log out, eat breakfast, and deal with everything else.

I log in again at 10:00 a.m. It's nighttime in-game. Oh, I see Mr. Ertz is here too. Let's go redeem my hides.

"Good day, Mr. Ertz."

"Oh, if it isn't the princess?"

"I bought hides for you."

"You have my attention."

10 boar hides go for 20,000. Delightful.

"Come to think of it, did you see that notice on the website?"

"The official website? I haven't checked today..."

"They're going to hold the first official event."

"Oh really? I believe you can check that in-game too, right?"

"Sure can."

They're going to be holding a martial arts competition as the first event. It will be a while before it happens—they're going to host it during the fourth week of service. That's right around the same time summer vacation begins.

"Are you going, Princess?"

"No, I'm not interested in fighting other players."

"I see. Well, it's up to you."

I'll just ignore the event. No change to my schedule. I'll focus on production today.

Which means I'll need the Beginner's Cooking Set. I produce it from my pouch; it's a transparent, square box containing a miniature model of a kitchen. I see a preview when I point it at the ground, so I'm probably choosing where to deploy it.

I concentrate on opening it up. And then, just like in the miniature, there's a small table, a cutting board, a knife, a frying pan, and a large charcoal brazier in front of me. The box is gone.

"Are you cooking?"

“I have spare meat, so I’m going to try to raise my skill level.”

“You’ll need a carpenter for the cutting board, but I could make the knife and pan.”

“Oh, I see. What happens to the kit if I use different tools?”

“You can still store them in the kit. You can replace any of the tools inside as long as they’re the same type.”

That’s quite convenient. I can put all my externally procured cooking tools inside, and they’ll be automatically deployed if I register them as my starting configuration.

Apparently, it’s like this for all production kits, not just cooking. However, there is a limit. You can only store one of each type of tool. When it comes to cooking, you use quite a wide array of things, so it’s not really an issue. For instance, you can have a small, medium, and large pot. There are also slots for several different types of pans and knives. However, you can’t have a fully stocked kitchen like you would at home. After all, the production kits are meant to be portable.

You can still carry utensils if you don’t store them in the kit, but each will take up its own inventory slot.

A customer came, so Ertz put his explanation on hold, and I got to work.

There are three types of production method. Manual, where it’s exactly how you would do it in real life. Semi-automatic, where the system helps out. And finally, automatic, where the product is instantly generated. The automatic version is treated as an art, and I can’t use it unless I raise my cooking level.

Say, for instance, you’re cutting meat. With the manual method, you have to make each individual cut. With semi-automatic, you can make one cut, and the rest is processed on its own. With automatic, you can register an entire procedure, and it will immediately be replicated.

However, the method determines the quality. Manual has no quality limit. Semi-automatic caps at A, while automatic can only go as high as B. Manual also

give more Skill EXP.

So, of course, I choose to go with manual. My goal is to raise my skills, after all. Now then, for the meat. Considering difficulty, I should probably start with a rabbit; boar and bear meat can wait. I'm assuming I'll need around the same skill level in cooking as the monster's level when I fought it.

I promptly take out a chunk of rabbit meat, which materializes on the cutting board. I can't help but stare as I take in the sight.

"What's wrong?"

"Did this much meat really come from a rabbit?"

"Yeah, I see what you mean. Don't read too deeply into it. Every meat drop produces a 1kg block. I heard something about the drop amount being dependent on the size of the monster."

"Oh, I know that. The eastern enemies dropped two to four each."

"Do you have Dismantle, Princess?"

"I do."

"Then that's from the increased drop rate."

"It's quite nice to have more drops."

"What are you making?"

"I'll go for a simple salt-and-pepper steak. The usual."

Now to slice and dice!

"It's hard to cut with this knife"

"Well, it's for beginners—wait! That sword ain't no knife!"

"I think it's got a better cutting edge!"

"That's not the issue!"

"It shouldn't matter as long as it cuts."

Eventually, I'll get cutting knives that increase the quality of the food, but the base one does not. It shouldn't matter what kind of blade I use to slice meat. I can use Laundry to clean it afterward.

“And wait, aren’t you cutting it a bit thick?”

“You think so? This is what we usually eat.”

“I got a vague sense from your little sister, but...you’re pretty bougie, huh?”

“Well, our parents are.”

I take out salt and pepper and use Firestarter to ignite the coal in the brazier. Then I place the frying pan over it and let it heat up.

“Do I need to buy coal?”

“No, you shouldn’t have to.”

“How do I put the fire out?”

“Just close it.”

“I see. I’ll go for a medium. Come to think of it, does bacteria exist in FLFO?”

“There’s a food poisoning status ailment, but I think you’ll know when it happens. It should tell you, since you have Cooking Wisdom and Appraisal.”

“That’s a relief. I’d hate to hurt another player.”

Once the pan is hot, I salt and pepper the meat before tossing it in. A fine smell and a tempting sound fill the air. Once some time has passed, I raise the pan off the flames, lowering the heat, and then fry it some more before flipping it and returning it to the flames. Soon, I lift it again, letting it cook a while some distance from the fire.

“Ah, there’s no lid. But I want to let it cool...”

There wasn’t much I could do, so I kept it over the heat a little longer than I would have liked.

“This should do it.”

[COOKING] LUXURIOUS RABBIT STEAK

Rarity: NO Quality: C+

A 4 cm cut of rabbit meat with salt and pepper, cooked medium. Cooked carefully and evenly.

Satiety +30

Chef: Anastasia

“That looks delicious. The quality’s nice too.”

“I don’t know. C+ looks a bit dicey to me.”

“What’s your Cooking skill level?”

“It just went up, but it was 1 when I cooked it.”

“Then you’re doing good. Production still depends on skill level and stats, though method and the quality of your tools will influence it too.”

“So you’re saying that’s high quality for the Beginner’s Cooking Kit?”

“The first product of any crafter is usually E-at most. With cooking, an experienced chef in real life might come out with a D. You’re doing way too good if your first product is C+.”

“It might be my dexterity bonuses. Oh, I didn’t buy any tableware...”

“You can store tableware in the kit. It seems like they mainly use wood in this world.”

“But they have glass here, don’t they?”

“Yeah, they do. I don’t know what to tell you.”

“I’ll look into it when I get the chance. Though it doesn’t seem that important. Now, about the tableware. What do I do with this steak?”

It doesn’t seem quite right to eat off the pan...

“Yoo-hoo, old man!”

“Hmm? Oh, Primura! You came at just the right time!”

“What’s up?”

“You can make tableware, can’t you?”

“Sure, I can...”

“I’ll give you some steak if you give me some plates, yeah?”

A rabbit-eared woman is looking at me, so I lure her in with a nice, juicy fresh steak. Her hair is pink and her eyes are light blue. She wears a somewhat stylish one-piece dress. In terms of this world, she looks something like the daughter of a somewhat affluent merchant and a little bit younger than my IRL sister.

“Oh, steak! I’ll have it ready right away. Ah, do you need forks?”

“I’d like spoons and forks. I don’t think a wood knife would work out, so it might have to be metal.”

“I can make them, but I only have bronze. No silver or steel, stainless or otherwise. I don’t even have iron.”

“That’s troublesome. Should I cut it with the kitchen knife then?”

“For now, let me get you some plates.”

She produced a plank of wood and then, in a flash, she was suddenly holding ten sparkling plates. So that’s how the automatic art Reproduce works. It looks convenient.



“For starters, you’ll need flat plates, soup bowls, and cups.”

I’m not going to question how a thin plank of wood can make a soup bowl or a cup. That line of questioning won’t get me anywhere. It’s a game.

“I think I can make a wooden knife if I try. Want me to?”

“Didn’t you come to set up shop or something?”

“Oh, that’s right! I should hop to it.”

The steak is transferred to a plate and then tucked into my inventory. Time is halted for items in the inventory, so it will remain freshly cooked. The only problem is that it takes up an inventory space.

I momentarily put the kit away and deploy it again behind the two stalls. As I heat the pan, I slice up the same meat I used before and throw it in with salt and pepper. I essentially have no control over the heat, so I have to use distance. My arms would be aching if I did this in real life. I’m only fine because I’m undead.

“All right, now about that knife.”

I could chargrill it straight over the fire rather than using a frying pan; it does have a grate. But I’ve never cooked that way before, so I can’t guarantee the quality.

Around my third steak, I get a notification.

Cooking has reached Level 5.

Acquired Cooking Art: Boiling Knowledge

Boiling Knowledge, huh? I didn’t buy any potatoes, so I don’t have much to boil.

“What’s wrong?”

“Well, I just learned Boiling Knowledge, but I have nothing to boil...”

“Mmm, makes sense. Oh, don’t throw anything into that pot besides salt.”

“Seriously, don’t!”

Ms. Primura was it? She sounds relatively desperate. I wonder what's up.

"Apparently, you know how to boil, not how to stew."

"Oh, I see. So I'm not capable of making soup, and I'll fail if I throw in anything besides salt?"

"Your food explodes if you fail."

"Huh? Explodes...?"

"Yeah, it explodes. The contents of your pot end up all over the place."

Why does it explode? That's dangerous. But it's a game, so I shouldn't think too hard about it.

"Can you make some skewers for me?"

"Sure, give me a second."

"All right."

Let's try again. This time, I'll grill it straight over the flames. I'll use a similar method. *Fire!*

"Look, another food terrorist cooking in the back."

"Without ale, I guess charred meat is the next best thing..."

I keep watch to make sure they don't burn before flipping. The basic cooking kit has more than enough firepower. If I had a complaint, it would be the size, though it's enough space for one person to cook.

The meat becomes a Luxurious Charbroiled Rabbit Steak, but the quality is lower this time. The heat distribution must have been uneven.

"Oh, it's done!"

"Do you want some?"

"I do."

"Then let's take the third one and..."

The charbroiled one fell to D+ quality, and I hesitate to serve the first, since it's been a while since I cooked it. I'll give her my third pan-fried one.

“Knife, *check!* True, it’s wood, but it’s got a serrated blade.”

That was actually the second of two knives. The first one she made is shaped like an ordinary, straight-blade knife, but the other has wave-like serrations running down the edge. The knives are very thin and look quite well made.

“Let’s dig in. Nom nom nom—*mm?!?*”

She seems to take quite nicely to it. I didn’t have much to work with, but now I feel motivated to try charbroiling again.

“That was delicious! Thick-cut steak is quite nice! I’ll give you more tableware for the meal.”

“Thanks for that.”

“Oh, but I’ll need to make quite a lot if I want to pay you back...”

Knocking down a tree produces timber. Timber can be processed into logs, which can then be made into lumber, and finally, planks. These planks could then be processed into table utensils.

One timber could make three logs. One log could make six lumber, one lumber twelve planks, and a plank made around ten plates. It could also make a hundred skewers or twenty spoons. The material cost was close to zero.

These items are fairly disposable, so it doesn’t matter what wood they’re made of. There’s no point in choosing carefully.

“I can continue giving you food if you provide me a stable supply of tableware. How does that sound?”

“It sounds great, but aren’t you losing out here?”

“I can’t raise my Cooking without tableware, so I’m satisfied with this deal. It’s just a game, after all. Plus, I wouldn’t want to throw away all this food as soon as I make it...”

“Got it! I’m Primura. Come to me if you ever need any woodworking done!”

“I’m Anastasia. I’ll help with whatever I can.”

“She’s Akirina’s sister.”

“Huh? She is?”

“I am. Do you know Rina?”

“Not just me. I’m sure everyone in the beta knows her. She stops by my shop and we talk from time to time.”

Rina’s equipment is mostly metal, so it’s more likely her party members who frequent Primura’s shop. Naturally, different equipment requires different crafters. Carpenters mainly deal with bows and staves, and Mr. Honehone is apparently one of her regulars. Yes, I do see that her stall selection is mainly bows and arrows.

Incidentally, I suspected as much when she opened up shop right next to Mr. Ertz, but she’s apparently one of the top carpenters.

[COOKING] LUXURIOUS RABBIT STEAK

Rarity: NO Quality: C+

A 4 cm cut of rabbit meat with salt and pepper, cooked medium. Cooked carefully and evenly.

Satiety +30

Tableware: Plate, Fork, Knife

Chef: Anastasia

Utensil Maker: Primura

There’s more detail on the screen now. I guess it would be quite hellish if you bought food not knowing if it came with utensils or not.

I continue to silently cook the meat. Since I received those skewers, my next attempt is rabbit kebab. The two crafters don’t talk to me while I’m working. Production is taken quite seriously in this game and requires concentration. I also heard that work while concentrating nets you more experience points.

Cooking has reached Level 10. You have earned 1 Skill Point.

Acquired Cooking Art: Stewing Knowledge

“Oh, stewing. I can make soup now.”

“Is stewing level 10?”

“Yes, 10.”

“You’re making steady progress. Crafters can keep going as long as they have the materials.”

“The materials are the problem, though.”

“Point taken.”

“Come to think of it, do materials have their own levels?”

“They certainly do. They’re usually somewhere around the same level as the original monster they came from.”

“For us woodworkers, the level of the wood is near the average level of the field where it grew.”

“I see, so it’s just as I thought. Does the success rate go down for higher level materials?”

“More like the end product is judged more severely, I’d say. When you’re making a high-level item, it’s easier to fail.”

“Hmm, grilling aside, I wonder how that works with stewing.”

“Don’t ask me. Maybe it spontaneously combusts?”

“But I can’t really take it out of the pot to fix it...”

“There aren’t many cooks out there, so not much is known. There are only three threads in the forums about it too.”

So there really aren’t any cooks out there. Incidentally, for blacksmiths, there are materials that are impossible to process if your furnace level is too low. For some reason, they just don’t melt.

Similarly, cooking sometimes fails if you don’t have the right equipment. However, as long as you have that equipment, there’s no material you can’t cook with. At least, as far as I know...

“Yeah, no cooks despite the fact you can eat anything you want here without getting fat.”

“I see...”

“That’s one thing to look forward to.”

“The taste changes based on who made it, and I’d love to have a meal on the go, but there are no cooks to make them.”

“Come to think of it, I don’t see any food stands.”

“Can they even do business?”

“I think they’ll have some sales. Honestly, a good meal’s a luxury right now, and people will always care about food. Do you want to leave a few things at my stall and see what happens?”

“Won’t it go cold?”

“You can pick up and touch everything on display, but it’s not the actual item. Don’t worry.”

If you set it so you’re selling from your inventory, then your wares will be displayed in the shop. However, they’re like holograms. It’s impossible to steal them, and they’re frozen in time.

I don’t see why not. I’d rather not clog up my inventory with food. I don’t even need to eat, thanks to my race.

“What about the price...?”

“I can handle that if you want.”

“Then I’ll leave it to you.”

“Considering the materials, and that flavor—oh, also...”

With a sidelong glance at me, Ms. Primura begins fiddling with a window. On the edge of her stall, an entry for 200 gold skewers and 600 gold steaks pops up. There’s a limit of three per person.

Rabbit and wolf meat seem to be going for the same price. Honestly, they’re both early-game small fry. The only difference is the texture, so that should be fine. Still, meat is a guaranteed drop. Will they really sell at that price?

“Isn’t that too expensive?”

“I took the cook into consideration.”

“Oh, I see,” mutters Ertz.

The cook? Really?

“So because I made it by hand...?”

“There’s no way a meal handmade by a beautiful bombshell princess won’t sell! Not to mention it’s delicious.”

So that’s what the glance was for?

“Hey, Primura. Can you fix this for me?”

“You got it.”

An elf man comes and drops off an instrument of sorts. I didn’t know they had those. Well, let’s keep cooking.

“Huh? Did you pick up cooking?”

“Nah, that was made by Akirina’s big sister over there.”

“Oh, *that* sister. She’s not in a party?”

“Doesn’t look like it.”

“So you didn’t ask. Well, both sisters are beautiful, so I’ll burn this sight into my eyes. Anyway, if you’re selling this food, does that mean it’s good?”

“Yeah, delicious.”

“I was just getting hungry, so I guess I’ll take one. Which would you recommend?”

“The steak, of course!”

The sizzle of the meat fills the air...

“I’ll have one too,” says another traveler.

I’ll try my hand at boar meat once I get to level 15—ah, no, level 13. Let’s raise it a bit more on rabbits and wolves first.

“Hmm, yep. It’s delicious. Perfectly pan-fried.”

“Yeah, it’s a real treat.”

“Isn’t it?”

“Why do you sound so proud?”

“That aside, I’d like to buy enough for my party.”

“No can do. These are just to spread the word. For large orders, you’ll have to consult the chef.”

“I see. Cooking was never popular. We’ll have better food if we get more cooks around, but I couldn’t ask for better than this. I’ll negotiate.”

Cooking steak after steak is surprisingly fun. They burn if I let my guard down, and the quality drops if I don’t heat them evenly. Isn’t steak actually quite a difficult dish?

In real life, it’s known to be so simple that it’s a direct translation of the skill of the chef. Upsy-daisy, oh, B—. Splendid. Now then, someone seems to have business with me—the elf who brought in the instrument.

“Hello, my name’s Norbert. I’m friends with Akirina, though we don’t talk much—she’s closer with our leader.”

“Good day. My name is Anastasia. So your parties are associated, then?”

“Wow, was that a curtsy? You don’t see that often. We’re both top-player parties, so we run into each other quite often.”

“I see, so you’re fellow top-tier players.”

“That’s right. Now about what I’m here for. I’d like to buy six steaks from you, enough for my whole party.”

“Sure, I don’t mind. I have fried steak and charbroiled steak.”

“Hmm, there will definitely be a difference with how this game works. Can I do half and half?”

“Of course. The quality is C+ on all of them. Is that all right with you?”

“Perfectly fine. Can I pay the same price as at the stall?”

“Of course!” So I trade six steaks with Mr. Norbert.

“Thank you.”

“Oh, no, I should be the one thanking *you*.”

Once the repairs are finished, he picks up his instrument and heads off. I watch until he’s out of sight, then get back to cooking.

I could really use an oven. Or at the very least a lid for the frying pan—I’d be able to make roast beef. I’m not so sure how well it will retain heat, though, so maybe I should hold off on that for now.

I really do need a full cooking set. With that in mind, maybe I should buy a house just for the kitchen—but that’s a matter for another day. I’ll think about it once I have a moment to spare.

Now then, it’s about time to change up the meat.

[INGREDIENT] BROWN BOAR MEAT

Rarity: NO Quality: C

The meat of a brown boar. It has a somewhat peculiar taste and should be processed before cooking.

Given that description, it wouldn’t work well as a steak. Now what? An additional step, perhaps? I do have Stewing Knowledge. Hmm, I’ll need to go shopping.

“Oh my. It’s already this late? I should stop for lunch.”

“Huh? Oh, it’s noon.”

“Let’s continue this later.”

“Are you going to keep cooking in the afternoon?”

“That’s the plan. I have plenty of meat to go around.”

“I see, I see. It’s good to have a crafter who’s not limited by lack of materials.”

“See you later.”

“Yeah, go spread your wings!”

“I will.”

I chat with Mr. Ertz as I tuck the cooking kit away. Ms. Primura is hard at work crafting, so I leave her be and log out.

Chapter 10:

Sunday Afternoon

I LOG IN AGAIN. It seems to be around noon in-game.

“Welcome back.”

“Good day. Is Mr. Ertz out for lunch?”

“He is.”

“Then I’ll go do some shopping. I’m thinking of making a soup.”

“Should I make some bowls for you, then?”

“Ah, that would be a huge help.”

“On it.”

When I log in, Ms. Primura is still in her stall. After putting in a request for bowls, I head off to find more vegetables. A soup would be rather dreary with only the onions and cabbage I have on hand. If I want to make a boar stew, I’ll need some lard or miso, which I definitely don’t have. Oh my, this is troublesome.

Instead of wandering the outdoor market, perhaps I should try one of the stores.

“Welcome.”

There’s a young woman at the counter. Compared to the messy jumbles at the stalls, the store keeps everything in neat and tidy rows. It feels like the stalls display their harvest as is, while a more professional store puts a bit of work into presentation. As a Japanese person, the upscale store is more familiar to me.

Though, honestly, I’m not actually seeing a difference in price.

There’s one thing that does interest me, though. It looks like they sell spices here besides black pepper. The pepper was already far more expensive than vegetables, but as it turns out, it’s one of the cheaper spices overall.

“Bay leaf, pure oil, virgin oil...”

[INGREDIENT] BAY LEAF

Rarity: NO Quality: C

A spice mainly used to remove the gamey smell of meat. Can be used up to 10 times.

[INGREDIENT] PURE OIL

Rarity: NO Quality: C

Refined olive oil for general use.

Can be used 50 times.

[INGREDIENT] VIRGIN OIL

Rarity: RA Quality: C

Top class olive oil. Outsiders refer to it as extra virgin olive oil.

Can be used 50 times.

It's 50 gold for a bag of bay leaves, 250 for a bottle of pure oil, and 3,000 for a bottle of virgin oil. Yeah, that's pretty expensive. I get the feeling bay trees and olive trees grow in the same region. Does that mean there's a climate like that somewhere in this world?

"Are you shopping for spices?"

"Do these two come from the same place?"

"Funny you should mention that. They're both specialty products from Inbamunt to the south."

"Inbamunt... Oh, you mean the port?"

"Yes. If you want to buy them, now's your chance."

"Do you mean they're going out of stock?"

“A coatl made a home for itself near the road, and it’s stalled business quite badly.”

“Oh right, the trade routes have been destroyed.”

“I wouldn’t say they’re completely gone, but we’re low on stock, and prices went up considering the fees needed to hire guards.”

This must have to do with those bosses. There’s a golem to the north, a bear to the east, a bee to the west, and a coatl to the south. They’re starting to have an effect on trade.

That aside...

“What spices would you recommend for a boar meat soup?”

“Oh, you’ll want bay leaves for that. First, toss the meat and leaves into the water, then skim off the scum that floats to the surface, and then add the vegetables. You usually use one leaf for every two servings.”

“I see. Then I’ll need the bay leaves.”

[INGREDIENT] BLELT

Rarity: NO Quality: C

A spice to sprinkle over food. Made from roasted black elt. Can be used up to 10 times.

[INGREDIENT] WHELT

Rarity: NO Quality: C

A spice to sprinkle over food. Made from roasted white elt. Can be used up to 10 times.

[INGREDIENT] ELTAL

Rarity: NO Quality: C

Scentless elt oil for general use. Outsiders call it salad oil. Can be used up to

50 times.

[INGREDIENT] ELTANA Rarity: NO Quality: C

Scented elt oil for general use. Can be used up to 50 times.

So these are essentially black and white sesame products? The eltana seems to be the sesame oil I'm used to, while the eltal is sesame-based salad oil.

"I'll take ten bags of bay leaves, and five each of the blelt and whelt. Also, one bottle of pure oil, one bottle of eltana, and two eltal."

"Coming right up!"

I wouldn't say the virgin oil is completely out of budget, but it's too soon to use it with my current cooking skill level. I'm still raising it.

Other than that, I'll buy onions, cabbage, carrots, may queen (potato), and garlic. Twenty of each type... Why do only the potatoes have a special name? Does it have something to do with the setting? The players are just going to call them potatoes anyway.

"Come again!"

I leave the shop and return to Primura's stall.

"Oh, you're back? She left the bowls with me."

"Hello, Mr. Ertz. Did Ms. Primura log off for lunch?"

"We're watching the stalls on rotation."

"You can do that?"

"I wouldn't recommend it, but we trust each other enough."

"I see."

I wonder if he knows about the trade difficulties. That's quite important.

"The lady at the shop told me that trade is stagnating. There are shortages and rising prices."

“Is that for real?”

“I specifically asked about southern specialties, and she said it was because of the coatl near the road.”

“You can’t mean it’s going to happen in all four directions, do you?”

“Well, the coatl would have to be the southern boss, so it’s possible.”

“The bosses are definitely in the way. There’s a high chance shelves will run dry. Two weeks, huh...”

To the outsiders it had been two weeks. In-game, it had been far longer.

“It takes some courage to make the trip knowing you might be attacked. If guard fees go up, it will be transferred straight to the prices.”

“Well, they got me. We might want to try opening up the west first, then. We’re already in a bad situation with potions, and we’ll be stuck in a corner if western trade dies down. The east is the source of field rations, right?”

“In any case, it’ll be an issue if circulation stagnates. If the residents are in trouble, we’re in trouble too.”

“But I’m a crafter. If the boss is the problem, there’s not much I can do about it. There’s a chance it’s that sort of event...”

“Oh, an event where defeating the boss will resolve the issue, but if you don’t defeat it, the game will go forward with the ‘trade routes cut off’ event?”

“It’s an online game. It won’t be strange if its events proceed in real time. When the residents are this real, the game moves forward in a way that makes sense for them. Perhaps.”

“We don’t know when it’s going to happen then. We might already be in the middle of the event.”

“We might.”

There was no announcement. What if there’s no associated quest to begin with? Or maybe this event affects the residents before the quest activates for players. The later sounds interesting. That would mean we can prepare ourselves if we interact with the residents beforehand. Good communication

will give us a head start.

But there's no precedent—this is all just speculation.

“Anyway, I'm going to keep cooking today—huh? Don't tell me I don't have a pot?”

“The Beginner's Cooking Set doesn't come with a pot.”

“How could this be...!”

“You're not a beginner anymore, so just go buy the normal set. It costs around 7,000 gold.”

“That's quite expensive.”

“The beginner set is just to try it out. The normal one contains far more tools, so it's worth the investment. Crafters generally buy the normal one straight away.”

Incidentally, each new set is an expansion on the previous one. The normal cooking set doesn't contain the contents of the beginner's set. You need to buy all of them and combine them. You can use them separately without merging them, but they're treated as separate items, so they each take up an inventory slot. I honestly don't see any reason not to put them together.

“Well, you wouldn't want to pay so much just to get duplicates of stuff you already have. That's why it's set up like that. It's easy to merge them, so I think it's a good system.”

“Cooking aside, does that mean that a blacksmith uses the same furnace from the start?”

“Well, the better sets add enhancement parts to improve its performance.”

“Oh, so it also updates existing items.”

“Yep, update and expansion. You might get a lid for that pan of yours. I haven't touched cooking so I can't say for sure, but I think I've seen somebody using one.”

“Oh my, then I'll buy the new set right away. I still have my hide money.”

“Go get 'em.”

I head north towards granny's general store.

"Do you have a cooking set?"

"So you're finally getting serious?"

"Yes. The beginner one is a bit lacking."

"That one's for complete amateurs. What about your alchemy?"

"I haven't started on that yet."

"I see. That'll be 7,000."

[TOOL] COOKING SET

Rarity: NO Quality: C

A portable set containing all the tools a budding cook might need.

I pay the money, take the set, and leave.

Now then, let's get back to Mr. Ertz. Ms. Primura is back by the time I get there.

To merge my kits, I just have to drag and drop. Let's do it right away. Now, deploy it!

I'm met with something like a system kitchen...

"Isn't this too much of an upgrade?"

"I agree, but you need all this to really cook. And take a closer look."

"Oh, it's just for show..."

"Right! There's no faucet, or gas stove, or induction plate. You just upgraded that brazier from that initial set a bit."

"So I'm still stuck using coal...but isn't not having water a huge oversight for a kitchen?"

"Don't you have magic, Princess? The Drinking Water spell's your faucet and

tap water all in one!”

“Oh, I see.”

Though there’s no faucet, there’s still a drain. Rather, the water just seems to disappear if it reaches the hole. How game-like.

As for cooking utensils, I now have a frying pan with a lid, a small pot that feeds one, a medium pot that feeds six, and a lid for each. Finally, what’s this pipe for?

“Oh, I see, this is for smoking food. That pretty much confirms that I will unlock Smoking Knowledge eventually.”

“Hmm, so you can make smoked meat?”

“Yes, and I also have some bamboo baskets for steaming.”

“It changed a lot, right?”

“Yes, and that mysterious frying pan I was using changed too. Now, the pan is iron and the pots are copper. I know my way around tools like this, but I’m not so sure beginners would be able to use them.”

“You noticed that, huh?”

“Yes, they’re both top-class cooking tools, but there’s a bit of a trick to using them. They’re not like the modern ones with non-stick coating. I still don’t know how much of those details this game has reproduced, though...”

“The time it takes to craft is cut down a lot, but the process itself is usually reproduced quite faithfully.”

Which means I should give it a shot. I’ll try the eltal oil.

First, I rinse out both the frying pan and the medium pot. After filling the pot with water, I place it over the stove. It holds food for six, so as instructed, I throw in three bay leaves. Once the water boils, I add in chopped meat, then skim the scum off along with the leaves. Next, in go the chopped vegetables, and finally, I adjust the flavor...

The vegetable scraps generated in the process are going to be stir-fried in the iron pan. I bring the soup to a simmer and leave it at that.

It's a bit sad that salt is my only real seasoning. I adjust the taste as best I can, and it's done.

Cooking has reached Level 15.

Acquired Cooking Art: Steaming Knowledge

The pot displays the dish as ×6. Every time I stick a ladle in and transfer it to a bowl, the number goes down by 1. Then, I'm back to making soup. In general, production is the repetition of the same task over and over. Mass production through diligence.

[COOKING] LOADED BROWN BOAR SOUP

Rarity: NO Quality: C+

A simple salt soup. The boar meat was processed carefully, so it has no off smell and is easy to eat.

Satiety +25

Utensils: Bowl, Spoon

Chef: Anastasia

Utensil Maker: Primura

After eating and taking a bath, there's nothing left to do but sleep. I log in one last time that night. Mr. Ertz and Ms. Primura are still running their stands.

"Don't production skills rise a bit fast?"

"Only at first."

"Yep, only at first."

"What about compared to other skills?"

"They're generally easier to raise."

"Right, rather, if it wasn't like that, we'd be way too limited. You need to

hammer the skill out at the start to increase your repertoire. And once you're high enough, you're finally at the starting line. That's where the game really starts for the crafters."

"Yep, yep. The first stage in this game is to get used to the skills. The second is trial and error, using everything at your disposal to express your creativity."

"I see..."

"Most of this leveling is to make sure you get the method down and learn the trick to it. If you really wanted to, you could reach that second stage in two or three days. Oh, but only if you have someone to supply materials, of course."

"I already reached Cooking Level 15 today. That definitely sounds possible."

"Wow, that's fast! Your cooking should branch out into a secondary skill soon! Enjoy it while it lasts, because from then on, it will be like most other online games, and you won't be leveling up as fast!"

It's certainly hard to raise production skills in most online games. They usually demand thousand or tens of thousands of repetitions. Well, I guess management wouldn't want you to get to the top too quickly.

As we talk, Mr. Honehone—commonly known as Mr. Skelly—comes over. Well, he's a skeleton, after all. A party request comes from him and I accept.

"Princess! I finally found it!"

"Oh, you did?"

"I did! I found something crazy!"

"It was pretty crazy for me too. What was it?"

"The Necronomicon."

"Is your sanity intact?"

"Oh, so you've heard of it?"

"I've flipped through a rule book Rina bought before."

"Oh right, Akirina."

For me, it was royal flesh—a beating heart. For the skeleton, it's the

Necronomicon. He only learned about it yesterday afternoon, so he must have skipped sleep to look for it.

“It was way too cryptic, and that trial was downright cruel.”

“Mine was a death game without any hints whatsoever.”

“For me, it was a huge, super-convoluted puzzle. But I’m looking forward to what I’ll become. I mean, if you give an intelligence test to a skeleton, it’s got to mean you’ll become a Lich, right?”

“You’ll have to level a bit more.”

“It’s probably a long way away. But hey, I can keep my current build. I get the feeling I wouldn’t have been able to make it there before evolution.”

“So even your current race was one of the conditions. I guess that makes sense...”

“Yeah, there’s a high chance taking the Mage evolution was one of the conditions. My magic elements and skill composition might have affected it too.”

“That’s possible, though I get the feeling there are special evolutions without key items that depend entirely on build out there.”

“That makes sense for a unique monster. It could even come from your fighting style rather than your skills.”

“That’s an interesting idea.”

“You wouldn’t get an inhuman population if you didn’t throw in a few surprises. You think there will be a few more now?”

“Well, one can dream, right?”

“Right. Oh yeah, is Alf here yet?”

“I haven’t heard anything from Mr. Alfred yet.”

“I see. Well, this should be enough for today!”

After complaining that he has work tomorrow, Mr. Honehone says he’s going to eat dinner and logs out; he must be sleep-deprived. I get back to cooking once he’s gone. I’d like to raise my Cooking until I get a secondary skill; I can do

my trial and error once I do. After Cooking, I'd like to try my hand at Alchemy.

When it's time to sleep, I put the set away and receive my food sales from Ms. Primura. It is an enormous 45,000 gold. Business sure is booming.

I book a room at the inn, stretch, and log out. Then I stretch in real life and go to bed.

Good night.

Chapter 11:

Saturday Morning

ON SCHOOL DAYS, I don't have much home time for anything besides eating and bathing. When I can log in, I make round trips between the union and the eastern forest while replenishing the supplies I'd used up *en masse* on Sunday. The game has days when some goods are simply out of stock at the shops, so it takes several days to replenish my vegetable and spice supply. I have thirty bags of salt, twelve bags of bay leaves, and one hundred onions, cabbages, carrots, and may queens.

I check the shops whenever I return from a hunt. But now that I have a day off, I'd like to take it easy and focus on production.

This Saturday marks the third week of service. The event will take place next Saturday. Not that it really matters to me, but my sister is very excited.

The problem is that more people are grinding the strong monsters in the eastern forest in preparation for the event. But I still rarely run into them, so it's not that much of a problem.

The north and south are still the main hunting grounds, and many players are focusing on those bosses. The north has the mine, and the players are starved for metal equipment. The south is full of strong wood, so those who use bows and staves are after it. Although the west has many medicinal herbs that would usually make it a top priority, the enemies there are bug type. Their appearance is an issue, and they come in swarms. You need AoE spells if you want to deal with them.

Finally, the east is home to rare ingredients, so only the few chefs—including me—are in any rush to open it.

I heard something concerning from my sister. Apparently, the number of enemies in the south suddenly dropped. The hordes of goblins are nowhere to be seen. The union's already been notified, but perhaps it's some sort of event.

It's a game, so it would be quite troublesome if enemies just disappeared without it being a sign of an event. So far, no one knows what's going on.

That might be why people are coming to the east. The enemies here may be strong, but that's better than having no one to fight.

On Wednesday, Mr. Alfred the living armor found his extra race. It is, more precisely, a rare race route than anyone can go down as long as they fulfill the conditions. Since Mr. Alfred was the first one to figure it out, his is treated as an extra race and it functions a bit differently from how it would for other people, apparently. He can't evolve yet, so he doesn't know the specifics.

His discovery is recorded on the log. Seeing that as getting the go-ahead from corporate, we leak some info on extra races on the inhuman forum. Mr. Alfred and Mr. Honehone are already famous, so they use their real player names. However, they described their source of information as "from the princess."

And then, management suddenly starts deleting replies—apparently because those users started using the term "princess play," which was deemed inappropriate. Malicious use of the term is picked up by scanning brainwaves. So management decides to intervene, and the thread was nearly deleted. It looks like the moderation team is pretty harsh. The fact that I'm roleplaying a princess has nothing to do with princess play. They are completely different things.

We release a screenshot of our logs, and since the other two haven't reached their special races yet, a screenshot of my race. We also publish a picture of the help menu entries about extra races and extra equipment.

The effects of my equipment we naturally keep secret. I'm not telling anyone about them.

Now then, as for the results of my weekday training...

Name: Anastasia

Race: Immortal Princess ♀ Lv 14

Attribute: Dark

Genus: High Undead

Species: Royal Zombie

Skill Points: 48

SKILLS:

Sword Lv 23, Defend Lv 20, Parry Lv 20, Armor Lv 20, Light Magic Lv 20, Magic Assist Lv 26, Perception Lv 21, Detect Lv 20, Footwork Lv 24, Cooking Lv 18, Alchemy Lv 1, Gather Lv 17, Discern Lv 16, Dismantle Lv 13, Appraisal Lv 22, Identify

RACE (MONSTER) SKILLS: Dark Magic Lv 20, Dark Aura Lv 16, Physical Resistance Lv 18, Physical Immunity Lv 15, Magical Resistance Lv 5, Automatic HP Regen Lv 24, Undying Royalty Lv 4, Royal Privilege Lv 1, High Undead

TITLE: PRINCESS OF PEACE AND ELEGANCE

A title given to a majestic and refined princess. Improves others' impression of you and makes them less wary in your presence.

That's what my stat page looks like now. My Skill Points are piling up, but I'm sure they'll start to run low as I raise my skills. I've decided to keep saving them up.

I rose two levels to level 14. At Sword level 20, I got Attack Stance. At Defend level 20, I got Guard Stance. You can freely change between different stances you have unlocked. Attack stance lowers my defense to raise my attack, while Guard Stance does the opposite. You can't use them at the same time. Meanwhile, the Parry stance I got from level 20 Parry raises my parry success rate but lowers my defense.

At level 15 Light Magic and Dark Magic, I got Enchant and Lance for both elements. Enchant is a buff, and the stat increases depend on the elemental attribute. Light increases Spirit while Dark increases Intelligence.

When Magic Assist hit 20, I got Lock and Unlock. At 25, I got Telekinesis and Delay Cast. As the name suggests, Lock and Unlock allow you to lock and unlock things with magic. Telekinesis is a magic that lets you move things without touching them. It costs mana to use, and the mana cost is higher the heavier

the target is. Delay Cast is a passive that gives you a longer grace period between when an incantation is finished and when the spell is actually cast.

Those are my only skills that have arts.

The attacks from rabbits and wolves have finally entered the range of my Physical Immunity. I'm actually surprised it took this long.

And now, it's finally my long-awaited day off. Saturday.

Should I do some more cooking? I have 100 of each vegetable, so I should be able to make 600 servings of soup...though that might be too much if it doesn't sell well. I can either put up a stall or do consignment.

You need to register with the trade union to erect a stall. With consignment, I won't have to register, but I will have to pay a higher commission. If I do consignment after registering, I can edit the settings in detail, and I can put a cap on daily purchases. To summarize, if I don't register, I'll just be setting an item and price without any more freedom.

The trade union is a gathering of merchants, and it has its own ranking system just like the adventurers' union. The higher the rank, the more prestigious the merchant, and you do receive preferential treatment in some ways. You can set up shop in better locations, they'll introduce you to skilled workers if you need them, and they'll help you out when you're in trouble.

Your rank rises through contributions: To be blunt, it's based on the amount of money you have stored at the union. The important part—as far as players are concerned—is that they don't care how you make your money as long as you pay it—it doesn't even have to be *your* money.

When you set up a stall, you generally have to manage it yourself. If it's a permanent shop, you can hire residents as employees. As for consignment, the people of the union will take care of everything for you, so you can just leave it to them.

Consignment is best for people who focus on combat. They can just drop off their materials whenever they come to restock on consumables, then head off again. They'll often just sell to their preferred crafters instead, assuming they have any.

Most crafters manage a stall while doing their crafting on-site. Not everyone's rich enough to buy a store. Stalls and consignment both have their pros and cons, and preference varies from person to person, so I can't say which is better. I'm a crafter myself, so I think I'll just set up a stall near Mr. Ertz. Consignment is more for people who don't have the time.

In any case, it all starts with registration.

The union building is down the southern road in the designated business district. It is a large building with a wagon and scales on its sign. I wait a while for my turn before handing my adventurer card to the receptionist. The unions share the same card; I just get another stamp on it. And that's registration complete.

I get permission to open my shop and buy a stall starter set.

[TOOL] SIMPLE STALL SET

Rarity: NO Quality: C

A simple set to establish a stall. It can be purchased from the trade union.

[TOOL] STALL SET

Rarity: NO Quality: C

A set to establish a stall. It can be purchased from the trade union.

There are two sets available, but I can only purchase the simple one—the purchase condition of the other seems to be tied to my number of sales and total profit. The more money your stall makes, the better stall you can get.

I get the simple one for 5,000 gold.

I also leave a few rabbit kebabs and 1 cm cuts of steak for consignment. The 1 cm ones aren't my main product. I sell them for 400 gold, and the skewers go for 200 gold. I have thirty-five skewers, so subtracting commission from the 7,000, that puts me at 6,650 gold. With twenty 1 cm steaks...8,000 turns into

7,600. Although that's only if everything sells.

Oh, I'll leave 50,000 with them.

Leaving money with the union ensures you don't lose it when you die. On death, you lose half of the money you have on hand as a penalty, so it's really quite important. I deposit it into the union bank.

Now then, my main wares at the stall will be 4 cm steaks and soup. Let's raise that Cooking skill.

When I check the usual spot, I see that Mr. Ertz and Ms. Primura already have their stalls set up.

"Good morning."

"Howdy."

"Morning."

I cheerfully deploy my Simple Stall Set beside Primura. All that comes out is a carpet and a small box.

"Oh, you got a stall?"

"It's pretty barren at the start."

Is that really all I get? It really is barren, especially when I'm next to two of the fancier pushcarts.

"Well, you'll be at this level soon enough."

"It's just one upgrade from where you're at."

"Oh, so that's why the next level's so expensive."

"Yeah, it's crazy to suddenly ask for 20,000, right?"

"You should have that much if you fulfill the conditions to unlock it."

Yes, you definitely should have 20,000 if you meet the sales quota. All it really does is increase the number of goods you can display at once, so the appearance isn't that important.

Now then, I can cook my steaks like I did last time, but what shall I do for the soup? The steak's satiety is five points higher, but the soup requires far more

ingredients. Unfortunately, my material investment doesn't matter to the customer, so I might have to increase the steak's price.

The problem is, while the steak is more profitable, the soup's better for raising my skill level. I also don't have to worry about it as much.

Let's go with steak for 600 and soup for 500.

The biggest cost is the meat. The steak uses rabbit while the soup uses boar. Obviously different dishes require different meat, but I'm not sure how to feel about this. There's such a difference in raw material costs, yet in the finished products it's the other way around...

"Of course the price will be different before and after you do work on it. That's common sense. I understand how you feel, but just give it up."

"It's the curse of all crafters."

"You're lucky you can even sell the item you need to craft to raise your skill level."

"Yep, yep. It's terrible when you need to craft it but there's absolutely no demand."

"That's one of the good parts about this game. They don't designate what you have to make to raise your skill level. You just need to be mindful of the materials you use."

That's pretty common for crafters, at least in MMOs. They have to make items that have no market demand to raise their skill levels. Worst case, the materials needed are also needed for other, better items that have a demand.

"But on the other hand, you have to keep testing to see which materials are compatible with one another..."

"True. I have to keep messing with alloy concentrations. As for Cooking, does the method affect experience?"

"From personal experience, I'd say yes. Stewing gives you more than frying. Steaming probably gives more than that."

"That limits your options."

“The time it takes to stew something is far shorter than you would need to in real life, so it’s easy. It’s the measures you have to take that are unique to this world that can get a bit annoying. You have to gather information from the residents. You can’t get info if you’re not friendly with them...”

“So you need the wisdom of housewives!”

That’s how it is with the brown boar soup.

Today, I’m considering changing from boar to bear meat, since the bears were higher level. Unlike the boar meat, the bear meat description doesn’t say anything about a necessary process, but there are apparently a set of steps I should go through... I asked the nice lady when I stopped to refill my supplies.

I had to buy things I wasn’t even planning on getting to loosen her lips, but that was a necessary expense. What a shrewd merchant! But I’m going to be putting the new item to use right away, so it’s fine.

[INGREDIENT] COOKING WINE

Rarity: NO Quality: C

Common wine used for cooking. Can be used 50 times.

Now let’s make it!

I fill the six-person pot with water and add bay leaves and cooking wine. Then, I throw in the bear meat chopped into bite-size pieces, ignite the flame, and stir slowly. “A lot of scum will come out before it starts to boil, so make sure you get all of it,” she told me. But I didn’t expect this much.

“Hey, she’s cackling while stirring that pot...! ”

“Is she a witch...?! ”



Eh hee hee hee, I'm not saying that aloud. I hastily remove the scum before the pot boils. Once it's bubbling, I extract the bay leaves and add the vegetables. All that's left is to let it simmer and fine-tune the flavor. Let's get to serving it out.

[COOKING] LOADED BROWN BEAR SOUP

Rarity: NO Quality: B– A simple salt soup. The bear meat was processed carefully, so it has no off smell and you can enjoy the meat's texture to the fullest.

Satiety +25

Utensils: Bowl, Spoon

Chef: Anastasia

Utensil Maker: Primura

"Oh, I got a B-. As of right now, I can't tell if anything's different besides the taste..."

"Isn't the taste the most important part of cooking?"

"...Point taken."

"It didn't change the satiety?"

"No, that's still the same. Satiety goes up if there's a 'Loaded' or 'Luxurious' before the dish name, but the quality doesn't seem to do anything."

"Well, Loaded and Luxurious have more to do with the quantity, right? That should have a direct effect on how much it fills you up. I guess flavor doesn't do much for an empty stomach."

"I see. That's understandable."

"Let's not get too caught up on cooking quality for the time being."

Now, before I sell it...I need to try it myself. The cost should be based on the satiety level and the flavor. Now, let's dig in. Bon appétit!

“It’s a lot tastier than the boar soup. I can feel the flavors soaking into me—and I’m supposed to be a zombie with no appetite!”

“Pfff! Oh yeah, you *are* a zombie, aren’t you?”

“Are you okay? It’s not leaking out of your guts, is it?”

“Don’t worry, I’m not Mr. Skelly.”

“Pfff...pfff, ha ha ha!!”

“Mr. Skelly would turn into a waterfall, though.”

Mr. Ertz burst into laughter. Honehone, commonly called Skelly, is a skeleton. He wouldn’t just leak, it would all splatter out if he tried drinking soup. No doubt about it.

“Hmm...can Mr. Alf eat or drink?”

“I doubt it. He’s a living armor— isn’t he completely empty inside?”

“It’s full plate armor. It’d probably pool in his feet.”

“I can just imagine it!”

“Quit it already!”

Mr. Ertz seemed to be losing himself.

“Hey, you look like you’re having fun!”

“Here he is, in the flesh!”

“Pfft! I’m dying...!”

“Good morning, Mr. Skelly.”

“Morning, Princess. What’s wrong with Ertz?”

“Oh, him?” since we were at it, I explained the conversation to him.

“I see. Well, I expect that’s what would happen to me. Not so sure about Alf, though. Come to think of it, do you eat, Princess?”

“I have a sense of taste, and there doesn’t seem to be any issues when I try. I just don’t have a hunger system...”

“It might be because you have a physical body. Alf, well, I doubt it.”

Let's start big with the bear soup. 800 per bowl! I saw bear meat going for a fair bit of money at the union, after all.

Oh, and speak of the devil...

"Is there something on my face?" the living armor asks.

"Hiya."

"Hiya. Why is Ertz busting a gut?"

"Blah, blah, blah..."

"Yada-yada and all that."

"lä, lä, Cthulhu fhtagn."

"That one you shouldn't say, Princess. Anyway, what's up?"

Mr. Skelly and Ms. Primura played along with me, but of course, "blah blah blah" didn't get the message across. I offer a proper explanation.

"I see. I tried it, but I can't eat. As for water...well, I am a little curious."

"You never tried taking a swig from the fountain?"

"No! I'd expect someone would shout at me."

"There's a goddess statue and everything, so it probably wouldn't work out."

"You'll get lectured at the very least..."

"Then why not try next you go to the sea?"

"...I'm not going to rust, am I?"

"Don't ask me."

"Pfft, I thought I was going to die there. So anyway, your armor doesn't have any durability, does it?"

"Nope."

"Then you should be fine."

"I hope so, but there might be a rust effect nonetheless."

Mr. Alf spoke with Ms. Primura, and once he revived, Mr. Ertz joined the conversation. I listen absentmindedly as I make another pot—this time

intentionally skipping all the prep work. I try to make an incredibly average soup.

[COOKING] LOADED BROWN BEAR SOUP

Rarity: NO Quality: C– A simple salt-based soup. The perfect meal for someone who has triumphed over a bear. Tastes of beary good victory.

Satiety +25

Utensils: Bowl, Spoon

Chef: Anastasia

Utensil Maker: Primura

Well, if someone lost, they'd be the one getting eaten, so of course they triumphed. Either way, let's dig in. Hmmmm...

"You've got a sour look on your face, Princess."

"Did you produce a failure?"

"Not exactly. I purposely ignored the process and tried to cook like I would IRL. Want a taste?"

"I'll have some," Ms. Primura replies, so I give it to her for free. Mr. Alf and Mr. Honehone can't eat.

"Here, it's on the house."

"Down the hatch. Ah, y-you want to try some, Ertz?"

"Not when you both have that look on your face."

"O-oh, that's nothing."

"Go ahead and try it..."

"How do I put this...? It's..."

"Savory, with a beastly scent. There's an exquisitely delicate harmony at play here..."

“So this is a solid C-minus. And honestly, I’m not sure how to tell you this, but it’s terrible.”

“Yes, it is. I should really listen to the wisdom of my elders. Now then, let’s make it properly. Oh, here’s an actual success.”

“Delish!”

“Removing the smell is essential.”

“I’ll say. This is delicious.”

“You’re selling this for 800? Isn’t that too low?”

“It only restores 25 satiety.”

“Oh, I’ll have to make up for the rest with rations, then.”

“I’ll be satisfied with that as long as I can wash them down with this soup.”

Could I fix the satiety problem by serving multiple dishes like a dinner set? I don’t have the necessary supplies to try it out.

For now, I’ll fine-tune the amount of cooking wine I need and search for the ratio that gets the highest quality. I get the feeling my system memos are going to be filled with recipes.

Cooking has reached Level 20. You have earned 1 Skill Point.

Acquired Cooking Arts: Reproduction, Deep Frying Knowledge

Reproduction: If you record the process of a recipe from start to finish, you can immediately generate an item based on it. This is an ability all production skills unlock at Level 20.

You don’t get as many experience points, so it’s unnecessary when I’m trying to raise my skill level.

I didn’t even know I wasn’t allowed to deep fry until now. The bear meat is my highest-level ingredient, so let’s try making it.

“I can smell a bomb brewing. Should I take cover...?”

“It’s almost lunchtime.”

“Morning.”

“Oh, Salute.”

“Yoo-hoo.”

That’s a woman I’ve never seen before. She’s wearing a lab coat and glasses and has brown hair and green eyes. She certainly gives off the image of a researcher. Height-wise, she’s a little shorter than me.

“Is that the rumored princess?”

“You got that right.”

“She’s more princess than I expected. I’m Salute. I’ve been leveling my Compounding. Nice to meet you!”

“I’m Anastasia. As you can see, I’m working on Cooking. It’s a pleasure.”

Ms. Salute immediately begins preparing her own stall. If she’s working on Compounding, that means she’ll be selling the medicines that are in short supply: Potions. Once she’s finished, she takes a look at my stall.

“These are some good prices...”

“You should have a taste, Salute. I recommend the bear soup!”

“The most expensive thing on the menu?”

“You’ll understand as soon as you have a taste.”

“You’re really pushing it. Did you try it, then?”

“Of course!”

“Oh, really? Well, I guess I’ll give it a shot.”

Happy to do business with you. With the bear soup, I need to sell two of each six to cover the material costs. Meanwhile, I make a profit from every single steak.

If you want satiety, you go for the slightly cheaper 4 cm steak. If you want taste, you go for the soup.

“Oh, it’s delicious! If I can buy this for in-game currency, it’s a steal.”

“Isn’t it?”

“Why do you sound so proud...”

Ms. Salute is selling potions that are in high demand, so she’s incredibly popular. It isn’t long before players are flocking to see her. And when they notice her munching on something, a few people take a glance at my cooking next door. What a good business model. Not that everyone makes a purchase, but a few sales will be enough for me to turn a profit.

After talking a bit with Mr. Alf, Mr. Honehone returns.

“Are you going to be raising Cooking all day, Princess?”

“That’s my intention.”

“I see. I thought you might want to go hunting with us.”

“I plan on making Saturday or Sunday my production day...”

“Well, I don’t want to get in your way, so we’ll head out. Have you always been solo?”

“Yes, and I generally go to sleep by ten.”

“That’s early, but I get it. I never see you when I get on late due to overtime.”

“I’m looking after my skin.”

I always try to properly look out for myself. My schedule is a good mix of eating, sleeping, moderate exercise, and stretching. Now then, it’s time for lunch. I could have Mr. Ertz or Ms. Primura look after my shop, but I need to make my own sales to meet the quota for the next stall, so I close up shop.

I’ll log out for now.

Chapter 12:

Saturday Afternoon

I HAVE LUNCH with my mother and sister, then take a short break before logging in for the afternoon. It's afternoon in-game as well.

When I'm back, a man I don't know has set up shop where I had my stall. He seems to be doing Needleworking, making clothes and such. He and Salute are the only ones around.

"Ah, welcome back. You can set up next to me."

What a kind offer, Ms. Salute. I'll take you up on that.

"I don't think we've met before. I'm Dentelle, and I'm raising Needleworking. Nice to meet you, Princess."

"Nice to meet you two. My name's Anastasia, by the way. Though at this point, I guess you can call me 'Princess' if you want to."

"Nicknames often stick better than your actual name. It's nothing new."

"I got a nickname in grade school, and then they never said my real name again."

"I knew a few guys like that. Sometimes their nicknames didn't even contain a single letter of their real names. Tragic."

"Right, right."

Ms. Salute and Mr. Dentelle seem to be working adults. They know how to talk with voices full of nostalgia, and they say it all in past tense.

"That's a nice dress you've got there, by the way, though the coloration makes me a bit sad."

"I agree with you there. According to the item names, this is the 'faded' series. I might be able to restore them to their full color someday."

"I see."

By the way, Mr. Dentelle and Ms. Salute are both at the top of their fields, as one might expect after they set up shop next to Mr. Ertz and Ms. Primura.

When I say top, I don't mean they're the very best around—I mean they're part of the top group. There's no way of really knowing who stands at the summit in an MMO. They're undoubtedly famous, though, and they make good stuff.

I set up my stall and start cooking beside Ms. Salute. It isn't long before Mr. Ertz comes back, then Ms. Primura, then Mr. Alf and Mr. Skelly. Even my sister comes in good time. She's not alone; she brought her own party along for the ride.

In this game, a party should consist of 6 people max, but, she seems to have twice that number.

"Hey, Sis! Old man! Fix me up!"

"Yeah, give me a sec."

Rina charges at Mr. Ertz, who's on the opposite side from me. Meanwhile, I'm approached by two familiar faces.

"Stasha, right?"

"Yes, and I take it you're Tomo and Sugu."

"Yep. We can finally register as friends."

"Hey-hey."

They're Tomohiro and Suguru in real life, Friend 1 and Friend 2. I've known them both since kindergarten. Although I heard that their character names are Tomo and Sugu, this is my first time actually meeting them in-game.

Tomo is a human with black hair and green eyes. His weapon is a book, which would make him primarily a magic attacker. He's wearing a flowing robe. Sugu, meanwhile, is a red-eyed, red-haired giant. He's somewhere around two and a half meters tall and seems to be all brute strength—at least that's what his appearance suggests. His weapon is a two-handed hammer and his equipment is leather light armor.

As it turns out, the crowd is so large because Rina and Tomo's parties came together. Each member heads for their preferred crafter.

"I'm surprised you can manage a stall surrounded by all these members, Sis..."

“Really? I’m friends with those four. Though I just met Mr. Dentelle and Ms. Salute today.”

“This is just a guess,” Ms. Salute chimed in, “but the princess’s Cooking skill might actually be around top level. What are you at right now?”

“My Cooking level is twenty-three.”

“Oh, I knew it. On the forums, there were loads of people complaining about how they were stuck around level 15 because they couldn’t get any meat from the east.”

Primura joined the conversation as well. “The chef population is already pretty low. I’d like a few more of them.”

“I see. Sis can hunt solo in the eastern forest, so she def has the materials.”

“Her cooking is delicious too.”

“I eat it in real life, so I already know how well she cooks. That’s quite a nice price. Which soup do you recommend?”

“Bear.”

“Yep, bear.”

“Gotta be bear.”

“Bear all the way.”

“The bear is the tastiest one. If you want to fill up, I’d recommend the steak. And for the best price, the boar soup.”

“So everyone’s recommending it, huh? Then I’ll take a bear soup and steak.”

The food in this world is just generally good. I doubt it would turn out like this if I made bear hot pot in real life. It really was worth it to pick up Cooking. My main problem is the fact that we’re still in the early game, and I don’t have much choice of ingredients.

The whole group sells their materials and has their equipment repaired. It seems they’re going to spend the day hunting. It’s vacation, so I’m sure they’ll give it their all. And I’m going to give my all to cooking.

Evolving my skills in a single day might be a bit much to ask for. My growth

rate has begun to slow down since I don't have any higher-level ingredients.

"Oh, there she is. I got the steak from that girl."

"I see. She's cooking in a dress like that. It's kinda of surreal seeing a proper princess playing at chef."

Oh, there's that elf with the instrument who bought enough steak for his party. There are music skills, so I'm assuming that's actually his weapon. Music skills can cast buffs over a wide area, but your movements are heavily restricted while performing. It's quite a finicky skill set. The instrument he's using is a mandolin, by the way.

"Hey there, Cecil."

"Long time no see, Akirina. You're as peppy as ever."

There's a human male beside the elf who seems to know Rina. Ah, that elf must be Mr. Norbert's party member—the leader, most likely. Rina immediately begins trying to hard sell my food to him, but it looks like he came to buy some from the start.

"Can you do some repairs for me, Ertz?"

"Yeah, give me a minute."

"I'll be counting on you, Primura."

"You got it."

The maintenance requests come in one after the other. Everyone seems to have the same thing in mind. Granted, it's a holiday, after all.

"Hey, Tomo, is your party in the top too?"

"For what it's worth."

"I'd say we're around mid."

"Rina's somewhere up there."

"Hmm, those two over there... You know, the fox and rabbit beastmen. Those are Rina's IRL friends, aren't they?"

"They are. I'm surprised you can tell, though."

“Ah, they used to come over a lot. I hadn’t seen them for a while, but it looks like they still get along.”

“Well, they’ve been doing nothing but playing this game for a while now.”

“I see. That explains it.”

Rina comes up to me with Mr. Norbert and...Cecil, was it? Norbert goes straight up to Tomo and Sugu.

“Hey, Tomosugu.”

“At least split them up!”

“It does feel like a single name,” Mr. Norbert chuckles. They certainly do seem like they should be one name if you put them together. Tomosugu.

“Let me introduce you, Sis. This is the first-place prize winner of that tournament I entered.”

“Hello, I’m Cecil. Umm, Anastasia, was it?”

“Yes, it’s Anastasia. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Likewise. You see Norbert messing around there? I’m the leader of his party.”

Mr. Cecil uses twin swords. He must be quite skillful—if I had to guess, he looks like he specializes in PvP, but those blades can’t be easy to handle. You might end up forgetting to move one of your arms if you’re not careful.

“If you’re talking about difficulty, your rapier is classified as one of the harder weapons, Sis...”

“Oh, that’s a rapier? I got a vague idea from the handle, but...”

“I got it to match the dress.”

“I see. A slender sword is a good match for a dress.”

It’s not bad to have a chat while I cook, especially when everyone’s a paying customer. After a few more pleasantries, and after registering me as a friend, Mr. Cecil heads over to Mr. Ertz.

Cooking has reached Level 25.

Acquired Cooking Art: Smoking Knowledge

“Oh, I need to boil the smell out of the boar and bear, so that won’t work out... I should try rabbit or wolf meat. If I go for something simple, I can use what I have on hand... The problem is...”

The seasoning, and the time it will take to dry. Humidity control is learned at Alchemy Level 5. Should I try leveling it up a bit?

Looking at the recipes, it seems I can make an HP Potion with distilled water, two medicinal herbs, and a zoomishroom. However, I don’t have any distilled water. Suddenly, I look to the side and notice Ms. Salute is selling her own handcrafted distilled water. The compounding set seems to include a still. If I can use it with the heat from my brazier, she might lend it to me.

“How many do you need?”

“I want to raise my Alchemy skill to level 5, so I’d like around twenty please.”

“You can buy distilled water at a normal shop, but all right. In terms of price, I can lend you the still to make 120 distilled waters—in exchange for one steak.”

“Are you sure? It’s a deal!”

“You know how to use it, don’t you?”

“I do, so I’ll be all right.”

I place the still over the charcoal brazier and pour in Drinking Water. Then, I just have to wait. Once I pour the finished product into an empty potion vial, I have a completed distilled water. I repeat this a few times before handing the still back to Ms. Salute with all the vials I made beyond 120.

Next, I deploy my Beginner’s Alchemy Set. There’s a large cloth with a magic symbol on it. I need to place materials on top and Synthesize.

There’s a poof, and I’m left with trash.

“HP potions are a high-level recipe, you know?”

“They are?”

“Those ones you receive in the tutorial are for beginners. They recover 50 HP. The unbranded ones heal 150. They’re a bit much for a beginner...”

Making the weaker version just means diluting a normal potion. Although I *can* make them with Synthesis, the ingredients are an HP Potion and distilled water. That’s too much money for leveling, even if HP Potions weren’t out of stock.

Apparently, it’s recommended that I start with synthesizing fertilizer or wooden arrows. I don’t have any weed, dirt, branches, or feathers. But even failures give HP, so I’ll keep trying to make HP potions since I have way too many of those materials.

Oh, but before I get into Alchemy, I should do some seasoning. I don’t know how long I need to marinate the meat for smoking to work. First. I’ll prepare some empty jars I brought alongside the cooking wine. They also had sugar for sale, and it was expensive...but I still bought it.

[TOOL] EMPTY JAR

Rarity: NO Quality: C

A relatively large empty jar you can use to preserve goods.

It’s difficult to craft ones of this size, so it’s relatively expensive.

I fill it with water, then add salt and sugar and let them dissolve. Next, I’ll have to shave the wolf meat into thin slices, but that’s too difficult with this knife. I’ll rely on the splendid cutting edge of my rapier.

“Can we talk about how my sister is using a sword to slice meat, though...?”

“You get used to her behavior.”

I’ll just ignore Rina and Mr. Ertz for the time being.

While I’m at it, I slice up the onions and garlic too. Then, I place the sliced meat, onion, garlic, bay leaves, and pepper into the jar. I’ll wait for the flavors to seep in.

Now on to mass producing alchemic trash. When I create my twentieth piece of garbage...

Alchemy has reached Level 5.

Acquired Alchemy Spell: Humidity Control

I got what I was hoping for. The rest will have to wait until the meat is done.

In real life, it's Saturday afternoon. It's also afternoon in-game, and there are quite a few people in the starting town. This naturally brings a lot of noise with it—yet through it all, a manly cry shakes the air.

“What was that?”

“Is something about to happen?”

The roar pierces the air again. I can tell it's coming from the south. And this time, it's followed by a *hoot*. The players—me included—look up.

“An owl...?”

“I think so, but it's too far to make out.”

That lasted only an instant. A ball of light comes falling toward us. As it plummets, the ball morphs into a massive owl whose wings block out the heavens, swooping through the space overhead before returning to the sky once more.

The trail of light it leaves behind gradually begins to take shape.

“Are there enemies coming?”

“Well, it's a bird, and an owl no less. It could be a divine messenger.”

“Yeah, I can see that happening.”

The light shifts, and a message crosses the log.

A world quest has been generated.

Location: Starting Town

All outsiders in the corresponding area will automatically take part.

“What?!” A voice cries out from somewhere in town. The residents react to the sound with shock—it seems like only the players can see that overhead message. Those blinking letters display a special phrase: *World Quest*.

At the same time, the help menu is updated. But the log continues to flow, leaving me no time to read the menu.

Confirming the scale of the quest...complete. Set to W. Quest Calculating the necessary roles and the required outsiders for W. Quest...

Supreme Commander...assigned. Commanding Officers...assigned. Sending request to each player.

Now is it just me, or is there a window asking me if I want to be the supreme commander of the world quest...? I’ve never even fought in a party before.

“Wow, they want me to be a commanding officer...!”

“You’re an officer, Cecil?”

“Yeah, I can accept that.”

Looking at the sky, it seems they’re waiting for responses. I don’t think things will progress until I press something. You don’t get a chance like this very often, so let’s do it.

Confirmed the participation of all requested members.

The remaining party leaders will be set as squad leaders. They will be spread among the commanding officers.

For all outsiders who are not in a party, please check the help menu.

“Aaah! My field of view!”

Yeah, I have to agree with whoever said that. This is sensory overload. I’ll need to fiddle with the settings to make things a bit more manageable on my end. I just need to see the information of my own party members and the commanding officers, I don’t need the squad leaders—there are way too many of them.

“Whoa, Sis. There’s a crown over your head! Ah, does that mean you’re the supreme commander?!”

“Yeah, there was a window telling me to make a choice.”

“Ooh, then it’s true?! Congrats!”

“It probably has to do with my race or my skills. You’d definitely need some command skills in this position.”

“That makes sense, if you have command skills at hand.”

“One of my race skills is a high-level command skill, so I think that’s why I was chosen...”

“I see. For now, let’s head for those markers on the map.”

“You’re right. Timewise, we only have half an hour to prepare.”

WORLD QUEST: THE DEFENSE OF THE STARTING TOWN

Location: The Starting Town

Scale: W. Quest Victory Condition: Repel or exterminate the goblin forces led by the goblin general Failure Condition: The goblins enter the town

Starts in...

The details of the quest are displayed in the sky, and the clock ticks down.

“Let’s party up, Princess.”

“Can the supreme commander join a party...? Well, we’ll find out if we try it.”

I send an invite to Mr. Alfred and Mr. Honehone. There doesn’t seem to be

any issue. Now, they'll receive the benefits of Undying Royalty and Royal Privilege.

I should pack the cooking set away and head for the southern plain. Everyone seems to be headed in that direction, so I can just go with the flow.

"The scale says W. Quest, but according to the help menu, that means 'War Quest.' It doesn't necessarily mean it encompasses the whole world."

"So the 'W' stands for 'war.'"

Mr. Alf is reading the help menu.

"But this is pretty sudden..."

"Did we hunt too many goblins? It does say the boss is a goblin general."

"The problem is we don't know how strong the general is."

"A W. Quest is essentially a raid, right?"

"No, according to the help menu, it's one level above a raid. It's quite literally a *war*."

"There'll be thousands of goblins, then? Tens of thousands?"

Mr. Alf fields questions from Mr. Cecil and Mr. Skelly. It looks like this is going to be quite large-scale. Honestly, I never expected something so big so soon. We haven't even had a raid yet.

According to Mr. Alf, a World Quest is what would be a main story quest in any other MMO: a quest that influences the world. If the goblins make it into the starting town, it will undoubtedly have some influence on the events to come. Perhaps we'd shift to a city liberation mission after that.

World quests happen at seemingly random times, and it's up to luck whether you get to take part in one or not. Though luckily they seem to occur quite frequently.

"So, we're up against a field boss."

"Yeah, a boss attacking a town with an army of mobs. Pretty harsh."

"If it were a dragon rather than a goblin, I don't see how we would block its breath."

“The breath would be the end of us, so we’d have to lure it to face away from anything important.”

Listening to Mr. Cecil and Mr. Alf whispering along the way, I arrive at the plains to find a massive gathering of outsiders.

“Looks like everyone’s here.”

“Well, it’s a holiday and peak login time.”

“Oh, there’s a crimson moon in the sky...”

“That there is. Do you think that caused it?”

“Maybe...”

The crimson moon is, well...it’s a crimson moon. It’s pretty conspicuous even in daylight. Apparently, it changes the enemies in the field.

“Now what do we do, commander?”

“No matter what we do, I don’t see how we unify this many people...”

“Right...”

There’s over ten thousand of us. And with this number of players, we’ll most likely be up against tens of thousands of goblins—otherwise it would be over in an instant, and that wouldn’t be any fun.

As I’m checking through the event UI, three players with silver crown icons over their heads approach me. Seeing as Mr. Cecil has one too, these must be the commanding officers.

“Hello! Are you that rumored princess?”

“We have the supreme commander and the officers together. But getting the squad leaders involved...that would be like herding cats.”

“Good day. My name is Anastasia.”

“Whoa... You’re even more princessy than I was expecting...”

“There is a royal assist being automatically applied to my motions.”

“Oh, I see. I’m Kotatsu!”

“I’m Lucebarm.”

“And I’m Musasabi.”

Ms. Kotatsu is a cat beastman, though her only modifications are a pair of ears and a tail. Her hair is brown and her eyes are gold, and she wears hot pants that boldly expose her pale legs. Mr. Lucebarm, meanwhile, is a talking bipedal bear. He’s cartoonified in a cool way. Beastmen can select how beastly they want to be; they’re a race with quite a bit of freedom in their appearance. He looks like a polar bear with red eyes.

Finally, Mr. Musasabi is a ninja who’s clearly not hiding it. A *ninja*. More precisely, he’s a human male in shinobi gear. Black hair and black eyes. His clothes cover most of his features.

“Yep, it looks like you were right about the command skills, Princess.”

“I see. So you need to be a high level and have a command skill to be chosen.”

“As far as I can tell. Now then, we don’t have much time, so we need to make some crucial decisions.”

“We can’t manage these numbers,” the three commanding officers say all at once. We’re in agreement on that one.

“Yep, I know. So what do we do, commander?”

“I doubt we’ll have any flying enemies this early in the game. We have no way of coping with goblin riders on flying mounts. So why don’t we divide people based on their weapon?”

“That seems like the only option...I guess.”

“Yes, simple is best. We’ll put the tanks at the front, the archers in the middle, and the magicians in the back.”

“I agree that there probably won’t be flying enemies, but I’d be a failure of a commander if I didn’t at least account for the possibility.”

Apparently, once the quest was generated, the participants were all able to select a role based on their skill set. The icon for the role they selected is displayed beside their names so you can tell at a glance.

And it seems that my supreme commander UI shows the number of people in each role. Yes, there are close to twenty thousand participants. That’s almost all

of the first batch of players.

“Mr. Musasabi, can I leave the air to you—if any flying enemies appear? Your division seems to just barely have the most ranged attackers.”

“As you wish, Princess!”

“Well, *someone’s* motivated. Anyway, with this many players, some of them are definitely going to go off on their own. What do we do when that happens?”

The answer to Mr. Lucebarm’s question is really quite simple. “There’s nothing we can do about it. Just treat them like they don’t exist. It’s pointless to worry about them, and it’s just a game. Stuff happens.”

“Yes, that sounds like a plan. Do you play a lot of online games, Princess?”

“Here and there, though usually 2d games. My sister’s more of a gamer than me.”

“Interesting!”

“Right.”

“Wait, are you Rina’s sister?”

“I am.”

“Oh, you’re putting that prize to good use then.”

We decide on a plan that isn’t really a plan at all... Honestly, we have no information about the enemy, and we’re out in an open plain, so our only option is a head-on collision. In fact, we don’t even have a grasp on our own forces.

“A War Quest? I like the sound of that. That’s like a festival to us.”

“A festival it is.”

“Please relay the plan to the squads.”

“Understood.”

They all seem quite into it. After the messages are sent out, we check the event UI. We need a better grasp on what we can do and what we can’t.

The supreme commander's voice will reach all the commanding officers. The commanding officers' voices will reach all the squad leaders beneath them, and they can converse with the supreme commander as well. The squad leaders have their normal party chat, and they can contact their commanding officers.

So, in short...the commanding officers are middle management. It looks like they can designate a few assistants as well, since it would be hard to manage so many people alone without support. They can divide up their units however they want to.

The system allows officers to speak with each other regardless of distance. It's a W. Quest-limited officer chat. We can switch between chat logs through thought control, which is quite helpful. It would be a lot more annoying if this weren't VR.

The officers relay the plans, and everyone shambles to their positions. It might have gone faster if I had given the orders. The commanding officers were all clumped together, so it would have reached the squad leaders at the same time regardless.

Let's have my party members Mr. Alf and Mr. Skelly go out front.

"Come to think of it, what do we do about the broadcast? I guess it's every man for himself."

"Broadcast?"

"This game has livestream and record functions."

"I remember something like that in the settings, but I didn't quite get it, so I ignored it."

"You might want to record the battle, at least."

"Well, there's some time until it starts. I can set that up right now."

"There aren't too many settings you have to work with. Do you want me to teach you?"

"Please do."

Ms. Kotatsu shows me around the record settings: the resolution, encoder, rate limit, bitrate, format and such. Let's have a large third-person perspective

with a first-person perspective in the corner—the default livestream template. Yes, that looks about right. You’d feel sick if it was all first person, and it wouldn’t feel real in just third person. When it’s third person view, it apparently shows my line of sight and what I’m able to see. That’s amazing.

Also, it only displays my base UI, like my HP, MP, and mini-map. Otherwise, it could reveal my build.

I can also set it to broadcast live, but I’d need to link it to a site that I don’t have an account on.

“I already see a few streamers. See that fairy holding a camera behind that player? Green means streaming, red means recording. The residents can’t see them, by the way.”

“I see, so that’s what that is.”

I can see a mass of light in a barely humanoid form hovering in the direction Mr. Lucebarm indicates. It’s following a player.

Fairies are a selectable race of inhumans, so there must be some distinction between camera fairies and player fairies.

“Well, it’s basically a festival. Maybe I should stream too.”

“You have an account, Mr. Cecil?”

“All the commanding officers do.”

“I see.”

So everyone’s a streamer these days. A green fairy pops into being behind Mr. Cecil and readies its camera. The others are already streaming. Won’t they just be competing for views if they all stream from the same spot? But I guess different perspectives can be interesting, and you can apparently have multiple streams open at the same time.

“Akirina has an account too, but she just uploads videos occasionally. She doesn’t stream.”

“I see. So it’s not just livestreaming.”

“That’s always an option. Ah, it’s about time...”

Roars erupt from the trees at regular intervals. They seem to grow louder every time I hear them. They must be getting closer.

When there's a minute left on the countdown, the goblins finally appear. This is my first time actually seeing goblins. They have a rather orthodox appearance for the genre, I'd say. Around child size, with green skin. You know what I mean.

Here and there, I spot a few special ones that tower over their brethren. The goblins come armed with stone spears, axes, bows, and staves...

"Report! We're dealing with goblins and hobgoblins, my liege!"

"Are you supposed to be a knight or a ninja?"

"Ha ha ha, I don't know what you're talking about."

"Hobgoblins are another staple, and they're a level 10 evolution. A general would be around level 30. I expect this general we're after is level 40 at most."

"I doubt hobgoblins evolve straight into goblin generals. There should be an evolution or two in between."

"So by that estimate, at worst it's probably twice the level of our top players."

The countdown reaches zero. The sky displays a single word: "Ready?"

"Are you seeing anything, leader?"

"I am."

"Is there a key word to kick things off?"

"Maybe the supreme commander needs to give the signal. We're supposed to be like an army, after all."

The lines are written on the window in front of me; it seems I need to say them for the quest to start. The countdown's already over, and the event might start automatically if I don't do anything—but there's no need to feel embarrassed. I'm just roleplaying in a game.

"Ahem. All right, let's go."

I form a somewhat proper voice, reading my lines with clarity and dignity. "O gathered outsiders, it is time to wage war! We shall not let a single enemy pass us by. The Goddess of War, Sigdrifa, shines her magnificent light down upon

us! All troops! Forward, march!”

Once I say the last word, every participating player is enveloped in a red light, which is then absorbed into their bodies.

Anastasia’s Royal Privilege is in effect. All stats are raised for the duration of this quest.

World Quest: Defense of the Starting Town, Commence!

The battle cries of players overlap with the roars of the forest, and the air quivers beneath it all. In unison, the goblins and hobgoblins charge toward us. On the order of the officers, the long-range and mid-range divisions begin their attack. The magic and arrows rain down on our enemies.

But the goblins have archers and magicians of their own. They mount their counterattack. Though a goblin is not much of a threat one on one, at war, things are different.

“They’ve never moved like that before.”

“Oh, really?”

“They shouldn’t be that smart.”

“They’ve taken a formation not unlike ours.”

I see. Their commander must play a large part in all this. The vanguards make it through the storm, and our front lines collide.

This is where it begins.



Chapter 13:

The Defense of the Starting Town

AS WE WATCH the backs of players fighting goblins, an armed group approaches from town. They're led by a well-built man.

"Oswell, branch chief of the Adventurers' Union, at your service. Who's in charge here?"

"I am the supreme commander here, so I am in charge. My name is Anastasia."

"I see. We want to join in."

"No, we were told to protect the town and its residents. Please leave this to us."

"Did the gods tell you that?"

"Yes. We are unable to die, so we'll take the first hit. If we are ultimately annihilated, I'll be leaving the town in your hands."

This is a World Quest, which means it can cause lingering effects on the world, and if the residents die during it, I presume they're dead for good. Therefore, we should be the ones kicking this off. But these are expert fighters who are hoping to protect their homeland. There's a high chance they have friends and family here. They won't listen if I tell them to hide in town.

Instead, I've asked them to become the last line of defense if we fall.

The branch chief will make the right decision. He has to. I know my methods are a bit unfair.

"Understood. Sorry about that."

"Don't worry about it."

"You heard her, men! Set up a defensive line at the south gate! March!"

"Hup!"

I watch the resident adventurers leave to form a line in front of the city before returning my attention to the front line. Now all's well as long as no

enemies get through.

“So what was your real intention just then?”

“Well, first off, they might be adventurers, but they’re still residents. We’ll definitely get a lower score if they die. I’d like to eliminate them from the equation.”

“Sounds about right.”

It’s just a game to us. We can gleefully charge straight at an enemy. But to the residents, we’re a bunch of crazies who charge to our deaths with a smile. Although the grace of the gods (according to the setting) prevents us from dying, we still feel pain. They are, quite honestly, weirded out by us.

But no need to worry, my dear resident adventurers. Throw away those guilty consciences. You’re actually making me feel bad for messing with your heads. Seriously.

“All right, is everyone ready? We’ll transition from Maestro to War Song.”

A short distance from where the supreme commander and the commanding officers are gathered are a group of players led by Norbert, most of them with an instrument in hand: the so-called music brigade. When players with the Spell Song or Magic Recital skills get together and play, it creates a synergistic effect.

The musicians play a majestic BGM as warriors fight on the front lines...and at regular intervals a wave of light spreads from the band, and every player it touches received a special effect: a damage boost.

“Next up is Oratorio!”

This song makes players regain HP and MP faster. The effects are amazing, but the music brigade is quite limited. It just happens to be incredibly useful this time around.

“I’d love to enjoy a cup of tea to this tune.”

“Y’know, they’re in full-blown combat over there—though I understand if you’re bored.”

“It really is dull this far from the front lines.”

“There’ll definitely be a penalty if the commanders are taken out...”

“My command skill’s been stuck at Level 1 all this time, but now it’s suddenly skyrocketing, which is delightful. But I’m bored nonetheless.”

“Oh, you’re right. It’s going up.”

While the commanders are lazing around, the goblins’ numbers are shrinking quickly. Though they’re more competent than normal goblins, they’re still goblins. They’re acting smarter, but they still have the same base stats.

That said, a few players have died and come back. The revival point is right behind us.

“Fae Army assemble!”

“On it!”

Slightly behind and above us, the fae army gathers. Fae is a general term for the faerie species, so this is a group of faerie players. The one in the front is a green faerie.

“Hmm? That sounds like Fairellen.”

“It does. What are they trying to do?”

Using the magic element that they have the highest skill level in, the fae are able to change their form. They’re a peculiar race. Fairellen is a wind faerie, and one of the best around. Her race and nature means she’s best at wind magic. The others turn shades of red and blue, and some flicker too.

“It’s a full-out assault! Let’s sweep ‘em!”

“Hyah!”

Hmm? Did I just hear something quite troubling? I must have imagined it. The fairies fly off toward the goblins and blast the ground beneath them with massive bursts of magic. The goblins on the ground dissipate into polygons.

“Oh, that’s quite effective.”

“They’re strong when they have control of the air.”

Now the demon race people are joining in too. This is terrible.

The goblins don't just sit around waiting to be slaughtered. They fire back with their bows and magic—yet this means they can't engage with their melee weapons. But if they concentrate too hard on the enemies right in front of them, the magic will rain down on their unprotected heads.

“How pitiful. Let's go again.”

“Quite pitiful indeed.”

“They are the enemy. There is no need for mercy! Do what they hate most. That's the most effective way!”

“You're not wrong...”

I give minor orders here and there as the lines defend against the goblin assault. In time, the goblins grow sparse. There used to be so many you couldn't even see the ground. It's sunset, meaning it's around 3:00 p.m. in the real world. This started around one, so it's been roughly two hours of battle.

“We've thinned them out a lot.”

“Seriously...!”

“It's not going to just end like this, is it?”

“If it does, we've done nothing but give orders...”

Suddenly, a roar rings through the forest, and a three-meter-tall goblin-like *something* in armor bursts out of the tree line, flanked by its followers. These followers aren't hobgoblins; they're the same size as regular goblins, but their postures and faces are a bit different. They're more imposing.

“Ah, that's clearly the boss. Thank you very much.”

“You just *had* to say it...”

“It's a goblin general with goblin elites, apparently.”

“I see, so those are elites—or wait, there are too many of them, so they *can't* be elites. I'm guessing they're the level 20 evolution. Which means the general is level 30?”

“It would be quite a bother if it were anything higher than that.”

“This might still end by our strength in numbers. It might end without

anything noteworthy happening.”

“That would be a good thing from the town’s perspective. It’s anticlimactic for us, though...”

Direct attacks on the boss are blocked by a membrane of light. The priests following the general are brandishing their staves.

“So how’s the boss?”

“The boss and its followers seem like they’re invulnerable for now.”

“Not good.”

Invulnerable...meaning they take no damage. It’s pointless to try anything; we haven’t reached the point where we can beat them yet. It would be like attacking a hero during a transformation sequence—it simply won’t work, and you won’t get your mana back either. It’s a waste.

The boss’s HP bar hasn’t appeared yet, so rather than the priests blocking all attacks...this is just scripted. We need to fulfill some condition. They even went as far as giving us a scripted sequence to explain this invulnerability! The developers put a lot into it. It’s like they’re telling us not to waste our breath.

As the officers stare sadly at the front lines, something rises into the air from behind the general.

“Hey...”

“Plan B, right?”

“Let’s do it.”

The goblins fly at high speeds, riding on round objects. I get the feeling that *these* are the real goblin elites. I was right to consider countermeasures against air attacks.

Mr. Musasabi gives orders to his own unit and begins the anti-air measures. A portion of the spells and arrows are redirected toward the air. I see a green flash flying, then suddenly, there’s an explosion that knocks the goblins off balance.

“You’re already using AoE spells? If it’s green, that means it’s wind, right?”

“Oh, you’ve got it wrong. That one was an arrow. It’s the Arrow Flak art that you get at level 30. It’s a valuable anti-projectile measure.”

“I see.”

On top of this, Ms. Fairellen’s fairies and the demon team have begun midair combat. They’re competing for air supremacy with the goblins.

“Knock down any fool who dares enter our realm!”

“Hya ha!”

Our realm...? And what’s “hya ha!” supposed to mean?

“They’re going to get through. They fly faster than expected, and there are too many of them.”

“We can’t let them into town—wait, aren’t they headed straight at us?”

“Elite thieves on ride bugs, huh?”

“So they’re trying to take out our leaders from above. They’re underestimating what we can do.”

“I guess game-wise it wouldn’t be fun if they headed straight for town. Not this early into the game, at least. But this is a good change for us.”

“All right! Come to Papa!”

“We need to protect the princess and the musicians.”

No one panics; they all seem raring to go. I’d say I’m one of them, though. It’s a festival, so it’s a bit sad to just watch it from afar. Should I start killing?

I draw my rapier and begin chanting Dark Lance.

“How many got through?”

“Let’s see...twelve of them. Most were taken out.”

“Hmm. It’ll be a pain if they come down and scatter...”

When the ride bugs die, the thieves are sent falling right into the midst of the players. After the dust settles, they’re swarmed and beaten down.

“Here they come.”

“I’ll take the first shot.”

I’m going to misfire if I don’t hurry up. I draw the attention of our attackers as best I can before firing off Dark Lance. I don’t want them scattering to avoid it.

As elites...and as thieves, they react quickly. However, the ride bugs are a different story. The Dark Lance swallows a ride bug whole, sending its thief rider to the earth, kicking and screaming.

“Is this supposed to be a skit?”

“Uha ha ha ha! It’s a comedy!”

The flailing thief falls straight toward us. There, it bursts as it takes a punch from our local bear. A critical hit to the neck.

“Oh, they’re getting off their bugs!”

There are six level 26 thieves, and five level 27 ones. The ride bugs are all level 8.

The thieves dismount their bugs and pull their daggers for close combat. The bugs, meanwhile, fly around and try to ram us.

“These flyers are annoying!”

“Ah, for crying out loud. My sword just slips off them! It’s their bloody resistance...”

“They’re weak to blunt attacks. The thieves are pretty strong too.”

Mr. Cecil’s twin swords and Mr. Musasabi’s shortsword are a bad match for the bugs. They resist slashes and have a weakness to blunt damage. Me? My sword relies on magic, so I can cut cleanly through them even if the blade slides off their shells.



I tried stopping one with a guard and smacking it with the pommel, but maybe that move depends on my strength, as it was completely ineffective.

The thieves are fast, but not faster than I can react to. My only problem is how difficult it is to counter their shortswords. They get in too close. I have the longer reach, so it's easier when I keep my blade pointed at them to ensure they can't approach. It's a thrusting weapon, so this should be the correct way to use it.

While keeping the thieves at a distance, I parry bugs with the edge of my blade. They seem to commit suicide on their own like that. Why am I parrying with the edge...you might ask. Well, if I don't parry, then my defense won't scale off my dexterity, and I'll fall over. I don't have any strength. I could drop my weapon if I'm not prepared. That would be quite a problem.

The elite goblin thieves are a tenacious bunch. I fire light and dark magic off in turn and thrust whenever they're about to get close. If they attack at the same time as their bug, I just ignore the bug's attack. I have my resistances and my regen, so any damage they do is quite inconsequential. I'm fine as long as I can keep my balance. I can manage as long as I know they're coming.

"The princess is actually pretty strong."

"This is my first time seeing her fight."

"Well, now we don't have to try so hard to protect her. Isn't that a good thing?"

"I'm still good for now. That was my first time fighting multiple foes at once. It was an interesting experience."

"You have good reflexes, my liege."

A party can only hold 6 members, and that seems to apply to the enemy too. They sent four divisions with 24 total members. The dark lance took out a bug, while the bear punch took out a thief. That dropped their numbers down to 22. The weaker bugs were taken out one by one... That leaves ten thieves and three bugs.

"Another thief down!"

Once Ms. Kotatsu takes out the first thief, the other thieves halt for a moment, change their grips on their weapons, and come at me all at once.

“Hey! Their AI just changed!”

“What?!”

“Wait!”

“They did something to their weapons... From the color, it’s poison!”

Yes, they’re ignoring everyone else and coming straight at me. Parry Stance reduces my defense, but at a time like this...

“I would like to focus on defense, so I’ll use Guard Stance.”

“You have to hold out until they’re all down, Princess.”

I’ll just completely ignore the ride bugs. They essentially do no damage. Let’s use Guard and Parry to stave off these attacks.

Oh, that’s right, I should turn Dark Aura on. That will let me inflict status ailments as I block. As for my set effect...Reaction Speed Enhancement lets me dodge like there’s no tomorrow. When it’s too hard to divert the force, I calmly risk a guard. There’s no point in forcing myself and giving them an opening.

I position myself so the thieves are attacking up front as much as possible. After all, I can deal with nearly any attack from the front. This is starting to get fun.

“Pfffa ha ha hah, useless, useless, useless, it’s all useless!”

“Our supreme commander is so reliable it’s crazy.”

“You’re getting pretty worked up. What happened to playing your character?”

“That’s a line I always wanted to use once in my life.”

“Aah...well...yeah. I get you.”

It’s impossible to stop every attack, even for me. But their daggers don’t do too much. It’s impossible to land a critical hit on a dead body, and that poison slathered on their daggers is useless against me.

My clothes have high defense too. Now that the sun has begun to set, I’m

regenerating HP even faster.

“Come to think of it, the princess is a zombie, right?”

“No, I’d say those parries and guards are the real issue here. How is she doing that?”

“I, for one, think my liege is actually a tank in disguise.”

“I’m curious about that hazy stuff that suddenly started pouring from her.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be helping me? Sure, I’m raising my defensive skills, but this takes a lot of concentration...”

“Oh, right. I’ll pitch in.”

“You looked so composed I couldn’t help myself.”

The elite thieves are all after my head alone, so they’re quite quick to die. The remaining ride bugs disappear into the sky as soon as they see a squad of those who had died and respawned rushing out of the city. That group headed straight for the front line, though.

Sword has reached Level 25.

Acquired Sword Art: Rush

As soon as the last elite thief is defeated, the elites around the goblin general begin to move.

“Their surprise attack on our command has failed, so their boss is making a move.”

“Do you think they’ll have more reinforcements coming from the forest?”

“Well, he’s got to have more than what we’re seeing now.”

The goblin general is level 36, the elite soldiers range from 26 to 28, the elite archers from 24 to 26, the elite mages from 23 to 24, and the elite priests are all level 25.

There are no other goblin elite thieves in the army. They already sent them all

at us. The soldiers are the most numerous, then the archers, mages, and priests.

“He’s got a lot of elites around him. We might be respawning a lot by the end of this.”

“The thieves were just a poor match against you, Princess. They’re usually on the stronger side...”

“It would have been more of an issue if they sent nine soldiers at me. Too much firepower.”

“Those are a lot of reinforcements.”

“It feels like round two’s begun.”

“Their numbers are about equal to ours, so roughly twenty thousand and the boss.”

The boss’s mobs are needlessly well balanced. I don’t think too much will change if we keep this up, but...an explosion rings out in our army.

“What was that?”

“Was that Explosion?! Those mages mean business!”

“I mean, it would be strange for them to have it, given their level.”

“This is your supreme commander addressing all commanding officers. The mages use explosion. Please eliminate them first.”

“With this equipment, magic will really pack a punch.”

“I don’t have any magic defense yet...”

“And the enemy’s lasting longer because of their priests...”

They don’t have enough priests, so their healing isn’t making it in time. Their elite soldiers fall one by one, starting from the furthest corner.

“This should be checkmate.”

“Should we surround them?”

“Mr. Lucebram, Ms. Kotatsu, send your divisions around.”

Lucebram’s division is furthest to the left, and Kotatsu’s is furthest to the right. I have our two flanks slowly advance. There are still too many enemies, so

let's take it slowly. We can wait until their numbers are down.

"Right flank, advance. Left flank, halt. Keep your lines even."

"Fairellen! Take care of the mages before they kill our tanks!"

"Just leave it to me."

Mr. Cecil issues orders to the leader of the fliers who shot down half of the riders. The enemies' targeted Explosion spells ring out high in the air...but they do less damage than they would on the ground. The fairies pour down their colorful arrow and lance spells of each attribute. The enemy returns an array of arrows, lances, and even explosions just as varied in attribute and hue.

"The sky looks fine."

"Yeah..."

As the dogfight dies down, our flying players can offer more support fire. The longer the battle is drawn out, the faster the enemy mages are eliminated. All that remain now are the general and the priests. It's only then that the general begins to move.

As a boss, the goblin general has three HP bars. It swings around a two-handed greatsword in one hand and wears metal armor. It's fully equipped. Where did it even procure that sword and armor? I shouldn't ask. It's a game, and sometimes game elements triumph over reality. It would be quite...pitiful if our foe was unarmed and naked. It might have a backstory of having pilfered those from someone, but that would mean it had already killed off a great many people...

"The tanks are having an especially hard time."

"A tank only starts to shine after Defend branches into Greatshield... At this point, they're just people who intend to become tanks rather than real tanks."

"The general's attack power is insane."

"Looks like it can one-shot you with a direct hit. It's a bad idea to stand ahead of the shield bearers."

"It's a dive game that only has first person... Compared to other MMOs, it's harder to determine your position."

“You just have to get used to it.”

“And with these player numbers, it must be terribly difficult to move.”

“I’d say. Oh, the first bar is down. Now it’s enraged.”

“Time for phase two.”

Wrapped in a red, misty aura, the goblin general jumps high into the sky, then slams its sword into the ground. The ground bursts open, and everyone nearby is assailed by the blast wave and fragments of earth.

“Wow... That looks hard to dodge.”

“Impossible, I’d say. Do they really expect coordinated jumping with that group? This is a super effective tactic... Do you think those fragments have a hitbox?”

“Looks like it. Oh, a giant tank is doing his best. That’s a sight to see.”

“Now *this* is a war...”

Mr. Cecil, Mr. Lucebarm, and Ms. Kotatsu provide live commentary, while Mr. Musasabi and I practically sit out. The general and the giant are both close to three meters tall, and the ground practically shakes as they grapple. The downside to giants is that they’re so large it’s hard to provide rear support, but they provide a real sense of security.

The shock wave is a stomp attack, while the fragments deal damage. Stomp is the same technique used by the northern golem boss. You need to jump over the wave to avoid it; otherwise you’ll be hit—knocked back and given damage. Even if you’re far away, you’ll be unbalanced. In short, it’s a very troublesome thing.

I don’t know if it’s based on time or HP, but the boss eventually loses its enraged state and becomes relatively docile.

Around the time its second HP bar reaches half, it lets out another angered roar. It’s not doing a jumping slash this time; instead it begins running around, ready for a shoulder tackle. Then, once it’s run enough distance, it begins spinning with its sword out.

“Yep...”

“That definitely looks effective...”

“If they were the same size, they’d be able to stop him, but...”

This was a group battle, meaning wide AoEs like this spinning slash were incredibly effective. A creature that size just running around can deal an unignorable amount of damage.

“The tanks are getting desperate...”

“That must be a special action. It’s ignoring aggro.”

“Right. It was properly targeting the tanks before.”

“That wide area of effect is the problem.”

“We have so many people that we have a lot of casualties...but we’re also whittling down its HP fast.”

The second bar is gone. We’re on to the last one. There’s another roar, a jump...straight into a spin. Those who were waiting for the moment it landed to jump are stuck in the air. This is terrible.

They needed to jump to avoid the general’s stomp, so they jumped the moment it touched down and are unable to avoid the spin slash.

“A splendid feint...”

“It looks fun out there...” Mr. Cecil stares out enviously.

“The World Quests must be pretty difficult. This should be the easiest one, right?”

“It should be. If it weren’t for the level difference, our giant tanks would have been able to hold them back.”

“Honestly, if it were just the boss, this would be an easy raid.”

“Well...if we look at this from a tactical perspective, it was their loss the moment the commander had to fight.”

“True. But the moment the goblin army was wiped out, our victory was already assured.”

There’s another roar when the last bar is at half. From a spin slash...it charges

and flails its sword around with both hands. And it's staring straight at us.

"Oh? Is it coming here?"

"It's giving us quite the look."

"...We don't have any tanks here."

"...Musasabi, go be a dodge tank for a bit."

"Good luck."

"Are you out of your mind?!"

The battle does not stop to wait for us to finish talking. It looks like the boss is preparing for the sort of attack that won't stop once it's been activated. While the tanks hold it at bay, everyone swarms and showers it with blows, but...

"Do your best, tanks."

"Hmm...the players on the flanks look bored."

"We concentrated so many players there, and there's nothing left to do."

"Should we call them back while we can?"

"Yeah, let's. The boss is staring at us."

"So that's my division...and Kotatu's."

"Counting on you. This guy'll probably rush straight at us. You can attack him from both sides as he runs."

"Yeah, let's do that."

"Got it."

Following the officers' orders, the players on both flanks swarm their way toward us. It's not like they have anything better to do. The ones with shields go out front, then the close combat fighters, and the ranged attackers behind them.

"If it doesn't come this way, are they just going to finish it for us?"

"I don't think the AI is that dumb...what did I tell you?"

"Yep, here it comes."

With a spinning slash, it uses its centrifugal force to send the nearest tanks flying off their feet as it charges straight through our ranks. We really need knockback resistance. The monster beelines toward us. There are players lining both sides of its path, and the commanding officers stand in file. It's like it's running down a dead-end street, being bombarded along the way, but it shrugs it all off.

Since it's running in a straight line, should I try a long-range attack? I have something just for this. I shift from Guard Stance to Attack Stance.

Then, I have Mr. Cecil and Mr. Lucebarm step aside, draw my rapier, and inject around half of my MP into it. That should activate Spiral Magi-Amp. The blade is enveloped in a spiral of light. And then...

"Liberta."

"Ooh?!"

"Cool."

The blade resounds with the snapping sound of a shattering orb; the spiraling light increases exponentially in intensity.

"Distance Sword."

Distance Sword is an art that lets you shoot slashes. Although it's a very fantasy-esque skill, the effect is pretty straightforward. Normally, it just shoots a hazy crescent moon of force. However, once it's charged with Spiral Magi-Amp and Liberta, it generates a marvelous array of particle effects. My light show makes a direct hit on the general.

It lets out a slight yelp but keeps charging. Yes, I don't think it can stop now that it's entered this phase. Let's leave this to Mr. Cecil and Mr. Lucebarm.

"Oh... I could actually see its HP go down with that hit..."

"How much firepower do you have?"

"I'm getting a good idea of the princess's fighting style!"

I take an orb from my pouch while I have the chance and slot it into my weapon.

“He’s got an intensity to him!”

“Ha hah! We four heavenly kings won’t let you reach my lieg—oof.”

“Nwah.”

“Gwaah.”

“It’s hopeless!”

The four heavenly kings (lol) are abruptly knocked aside. The boss appears to be aiming solely for me. I’ll die if I try guarding. Let’s try to parry, then. I change to Guard Stance. It swings down with all its might, using both its hefty arms, and I manage to divert it. But those motions...I stoop to dodge the spin slash that comes after, then jump. On its next spin, it tries to slash diagonally upward. How merciless can you be? I can feel its murderous intent.

“Yeah, the princess can parry tank. Still, we can’t let her go down! It will definitely lower our score!”

“Right!”

“Aim at its back!”

Despite all the attacks striking its back, the aggro stays on me. The tanks who came to switch out with me don’t even distract it for a second, and it’s quickly back on my tail.

“I don’t...remember...doing anything...to make it resent me...”

“Sometimes just living is enough to earn resentment...”

“The world is harsh.”

“You’re really taking it easy.”

No, the level distance is actually making this quite difficult. My weapon will be struck from my hand if I make the slightest mistake. The rapier is under a lot of stress, and a normal weapon would have snapped by now. Left to right, right to left, bottom to top. Busy, busy.

I duck under another spin slash, then the next attack is...oh no! It’s too late to parry!

“Snap...”

I forcefully try to repel it...but it's not enough. I can't dodge, I can't parry. I take a direct blow to my left arm and lose it. Literally. It took my arm.

"So it doesn't just happen when I die...!"

"That's an undead's Lost Part effect!"

I switch out with the tanks again for a short break. Let's use Dark Heal to get back some HP. Losing the arm meant I didn't die instantly, but it took 60 percent of my health. That was close.

You can't fix a lost limb without the right item. I now have a transparent appendage that can't interact with my surroundings. While I'm not whole, it looks like my max HP is also lowered. I can't recover the last fourth...no, more like a fifth of my HP.

I have four limbs so... Wait, can I lose my head, then? Is that the last fifth?

"You forgot something, Princess."

"Oh, thanks."

Ms. Kotatsu tosses my severed arm at me, and I stab my rapier into the ground to catch it... It looks like even if I don't have the item that lets me repair limbs, I'm fine as long as I can recover my cut-off body part. Concerningly, I'm still getting a stat penalty, but I can at least stick it back on.

"This dexterity drop is quite harsh. I hope it only applies to my left hand."

"Just a little left! Keep pushing!"

"Uuoooo!"

The fierce barrage from the players finally forces the general to the ground, where it dissipates. It looks like the World Quest doesn't leave bodies behind. Well, it would have been a major problem if all those goblin bodies stuck around.

Oh, I have another line to read.

"We are victorious!"

World Quest: Defense of the Starting Town, Complete Confirming Quest

Evaluation...

“Hoorah!”

Supreme Commander Casualties... 0

Commanding Officer Casualties... 0

Outsider Casualties... 8451

Damage to the Target... 0%

Resident Casualties... 0

Adventurer Casualties... 0

Since it's showing up on the list, I can assume our rank would have fallen if I died. The squad leaders and the normal players did die quite a bit, though.

“Damage to the target” probably refers to the town.

“Resident casualties” is clear, but “adventurer casualties” must only refer to the resident adventurers... I was right to have them stand down.

The penalty for a death usually involves a temporary stat drop, a loss of EXP, the loss of half the money you have on hand, and lost durability on your equipment. However, this penalty was changed during the event. The durability loss was even greater than normal, and players could only respawn within the event area, but the other penalties were waived.

There's also a different penalty when you're PKed or you die trying to PK.

Final Rank: S

For a perfect clear, a bonus has been added to the reward.

As the residents are unharmed, their impression of outsiders has improved.

Your Race Level has increased.

Dark Aura has reached Level 20. Its effects have increased.

There's another hooting in the sky with the appearance of enough owls to shroud the heavens—they're delivering a reward to each individual player.



“It’s a little scary to see so many owls...” Ms. Kotatsu shudders.

“They are birds of prey, after all...” Mr. Musasabi nonchalantly whispers back.

“There must be one for every player...”

This time, they’re messengers of the gods, so I don’t even know if they’re living things.

Now let’s look at my reward. First, money—15,000 exactly. Next, my inventory is *absolutely full* of goblin drops.

“...I’m not wild for that.”

“Well, we were up against an army of goblins...”

“I understand what you’re saying...but I don’t want to accept it...”

“Let’s just be thankful the elite and general’s drops are in there too.”

“Was the boost in resident opinion part of the reward, do you think?”

“It might be.”

“I’m sure it is. Building a good relationship with the residents is important. You can get quite a bit of information from talking to them.”

“And considering it boosted our reputation with residents we don’t usually talk to, it’s a good reward.”

As the five commanders chat, Rina makes her way over.

“Good work, Sis. Did you get anything nice?”

“No...nothing in particular. The only thing that stands out is the goblin general’s magic stone.”

“A magic stone... That’s usually a cash shop item...”

Now let’s head back and continue cooking. It looks like the others are going to head out on a hunt after a short break. They sure are a lively bunch.

Official BBS 4

[Goblin] Starting Town World Quest [Army]

1. Management

This is a thread about the world quest occurring in the starting town. Please use it to talk about the event.

860. Defending Adventurer I can't seeeeeeee!

861. Defending Adventurer Waaaaaaaah!!

862. Defending Adventurer My eyes! My eyes!

863. Defending Adventurer I understand how you feel, but calm down. I can't see either.

864. Defending Adventurer I know all the famous beta players, but who's the supreme commander?

865. Defending Adventurer Who knows?

866. Defending Adventurer I saw her. She has a crown mark over her head. The supreme commander princess.

867. Defending Adventurer >> 866 Princess? There's a princess in town?

868. Defending Adventurer >> 867 No, she's just called that. She's an inhuman, a princess of the undead. The inhuman forums had a field day when the info was released.

869. Defending Adventurer Management shut it down.

870. Defending Adventurer What happened in that thread that they'd do that?!

871. Defending Adventurer >> 870 I caught the thread too early to see it, but it got deleted as soon as they started discussing princess play. They went wild in there.

872. Defending Adventurer >> 871 If you overdo it, they force-teleport you to the punishment room. Now they flagged brainwaves of the term “Princess Play.” You’re fine if you write it with pure intentions.

999. Defending Adventurer Where's the new thread?

1000. Defending Adventurer Will management post the next thread too?

1001. Defending Adventurer

1002. Defending Adventurer Huh?

1003. Management

What gave you the impression that 1000 messages is the limit?

1004. Defending Adventurer Lol

1005. Defending Adventurer What's that supposed to mean?

[illegible]

2320. Defending Adventurer Here it comes!

2321. Defending Adventurer

3!

2322. Defending Adventurer

2!

2323. Defending Adventurer

1!

2324. Defending Adventurer

1!

2325. Defending Adventurer Sta... Huh?

2326. Defending Adventurer It stopped at “Ready!” Seriously?

2327. Defending Adventurer Ooooooh!

2328. Defending Adventurer So the supreme commander has to give a speech!

2329. Defending Adventurer Royal Privilege? Is that a race skill?

2330. Defending Adventurer Must be a command skill. I don't know how good it is.

2331. Defending Adventurer She's a princess. It makes sense that she has a command skill.

2438. Defending Adventurer Ha ha! Goblins are no match for me!

2439. Defending Adventurer I feel invincible!

2440. Defending Adventurer Time to earn some coin... Are we even getting paid for this?

2441. Defending Adventurer Well, we're getting skill levels.

2442. Defending Adventurer You guys sure are spending a lot of time relaxing in the middle of battle.

2443. Defending Adventurer So are you.

2444. Defending Adventurer I'm just lurking.

2445. Defending Adventurer What a coincidence! So am I.

2446. Defending Adventurer I know, right?

2447. Defending Adventurer It's not like you have to type. You can post while fighting once you get used to it.

2448. Defending Adventurer Thought input FTW!

[illegible]

2812. Defending Adventurer

2813. Defending Adventurer The orders from our commanders are actually

pretty useful.

2814. Defending Adventurer Yeah, better to have them than not. I can't tell what's going on with the whole army.

2815. Defending Adventurer

2816. Defending Adventurer How am I supposed to help if you're posting anonymously?!

2817. Defending Adventurer New order from Princess.

2818. Defending Adventurer

2819. Defending Adventurer I never noticed until she brought it up.

2820. Defending Adventurer I'm not a party leader, so I have no idea what you're talking about.

2821. Defending Adventurer Oh right, this channel's only for leaders.

2822. Defending Adventurer Thanks, Princess! I almost let them through.

2823. Defending Adventurer You'll get beheaded if you take that attitude with a princess.

2824. Defending Adventurer My liege is hard at work!

2825. Defending Adventurer I'm going to die here.

2826. Defending Adventurer Keep at it, soldier.

2827. Defending Adventurer Stop it! Each one's weak, but there are way too many of them!

2828. Defending Adventurer Well, they're goblins.

[illegible]

3253. Defending Adventurer

3254. Defending Adventurer The general!

3255. Defending Adventurer With his whole entourage!

3256. Defending Adventurer We got an anti-air order!

3257. Defending Adventurer Musasabi's unit, get off the forum and go deal with it! Cause I can't.

3258. Defending Adventurer What a coincidence, I can't either.

3259. Defending Adventurer The sky? Yeah, not for me.

3260. Defending Adventurer It's those things. Ride bugs.

3261. Defending Adventurer Ridable insects. The name says it all.

3262. Defending Adventurer They've got elite thieves riding them.

3263. Defending Adventurer Oh, that effect's Aero Flak!

3264. Defending Adventurer The one you get at bow level 30. You need a secondary skill.

3265. Defending Adventurer

3266. Defending Adventurer Around half of them got through, though. Isn't this quest over if they get into town?

3267. Defending Adventurer Yeah, well...looks like they're flying straight at the supreme commander.

3268. Defending Adventurer Is management being merciful?

3269. Management

Who can say?

3270. Defending Adventurer Lul

3271. Defending Adventurer Who can say?

3272. Defending Adventurer Well, not many people have anti-air skills yet. They need to have a little mercy.

3272. Defending Adventurer Yeah, it would be harsh if they just sent them straight to town at our current level.

[illegible]

3531. Commanding Officer News flash. The princess is strong.

3532. Defending Adventurer So you're one of them! What's with the name, are you bragging or something?

3533. Defending Adventurer Huh? Oh yeah. Well, good luck, my liege.

3534. Defending Adventurer We know who you are.

3535. Musasabi

You've got me!

3536. Defending Adventurer Shut up, ninja.

3537. Defending Adventurer Shouldn't you go help her?

3538. Musasabi

No, I don't have to. The princess is being targeted, but she's not in harm's way.

3538. Cecil

We're good over here, keep your eyes on the front line.

3539. Defending Adventurer Roger that.

[illegible]

4111. Defending Adventurer Whoa, the boss is moving!

4112. Defending Adventurer Hya ha! Let's blow him to the stone age!

4113. Defending Adventurer Hya ha!

4114. Defending Adventurer I died. Can you tell me what just happened?

4115. Defending Adventurer New info from the commander. The goblin mages are using Explosion. She wants us to take care of them.

4116. Defending Adventurer I see. AoE spells.

4117. Defending Adventurer The ones you learn when you get a secondary magic skill.

4118. Defending Adventurer If you can choose a point to blow up, can you target yourself?

5282. Defending Adventurer Takashiiii!

5283. Defending Adventurer Hey! Don't just leave me hanging!

5284. Defending Adventurer I didn't think anyone would actually join in on that at a time like this.

5285. Defending Adventurer Mama mia...

5286. Defending Adventurer ...Did he die? Takashi?

5287. Defending Adventurer Yeah, he respawned.

5288. Defending Adventurer Hey!

5289. Defending Adventurer Keep its attention!

5290. Defending Adventurer He's merciless lol.

5291. Defending Adventurer My God...how many attack patterns does it have?

5292. Defending Adventurer

[illegible]

6953. Defending Adventurer Isn't the general acting strange?

6954. Defending Adventurer You think so?

6955. Defending Adventurer Where is he looking?

6956. Defending Adventurer Huh? Well...yeah, where's he looking?

6957. Kotatsu

He's giving us the stink eye.

6958. Defending Adventurer For real?

6959. Kotatsu

To be more precise, he's staring daggers at our commander.

6960. Defending Adventurer The princess is pretty cute. I understand how he feels.

6961. Defending Adventurer He definitely doesn't get it.

7258. Defending Adventurer No! Sir!

7259. Defending Adventurer My commanding officer just got thrown aside!

7260. Defending Adventurer That serious expression is so lovely!

7261. Defending Adventurer What's with these guys?

7262. Defending Adventurer That swaying chest is wonderful! I can't get

7263. Defending Adventurer I'm sorry.

7264. Defending Adventurer At least someone's a decent person.

7265. Defending Adventurer I am, huh? I can almost see it... So close...

7265. Defending Adventurer He's hopeless too!

7266. Defending Adventurer Those hemispheres that bounce with every

7267. Lucebarm

Quit looking at the princess and start attacking!

7268. Defending Adventurer Twenty more minutes please.

7269. Lucebarm

That long?!

7270. Defending Adventurer All right, then thirty!

7271. Lucebarm

Don't make it even longer!

7272. Defending Adventurer I love how bear bro actually humors him with a

7273. Lucebarm

Shut up and hurry!

[illegible]

7353. Defending Adventurer Commander! Your arm!

7354. Defending Adventurer That's a small price to pay. An arm for victory.

7355. Defending Adventurer Huh? Isn't she...

7356. Defending Adventurer You're imagining things. Keep it to yourself.

7357. Defending Adventurer Oh right, the princess is a zombie.

7358. Defending Adventurer Isn't that only supposed to happen when you're incapacitated?

7359. Defending Adventurer Those shield bearers covering for the princess as soon as she loses an arm...what passion!

3760. Defending Adventurer If she hadn't lost an arm, the boss would've one-shot her. That saved her.

7361. Defending Adventurer Death is a small price to pay.

[illegible]

7741. Defending Adventurer We won!

7742. Defending Adventurer Wooooo...oh?

7743. Defending Adventurer Looks like she's got to say another speech.

7744. Defending Adventurer Wooooo!

7745. Defending Adventurer Yeah! Wonderful, Princess!

7746. Musasabi

Good work, everyone!

7747. Defending Adventurer My skills went through the roof.

7748. Defending Adventurer That was a good battle, but it will only get harder from here.

7749. Defending Adventurer This is probably the easiest one.

7750. Defending Adventurer Right. Good work.

Epilogue

IT'S ALMOST TIME for dinner. I should log out and get some rest.

I remove the headset and stretch before getting out of bed. I'll go brew some tea... I'm in the mood for royal.

In the kitchen, I prepare water, milk, and my favorite teacup. I fill it half-full with water, then pour that water into a pot and boil it. I add a heaping teaspoon of assam tea and let it steep for around three minutes.

Then, I half fill my teacup with milk and add that to the pot. Once it starts bubbling, I turn off the burner and return the concoction to my cup.

The air conditioning is on full force, so a hot drink is nice. I'll have it with sugar.

As I read and lounge around, my mother returns. I'll help her cook dinner.

Eventually, my sister scampers down the steps, and we can eat.

"Do you have a technical build, Sis?"

"Hmm... Something like that. I took my production skills partly because their stat boosts match up with my play style. Most of my skills are passive."

There are generally three build directions in the game. They're essentially the base templates. First are reliable builds. Then technical—also called "special." And then there are the players who just pick whatever they want since they're in it for the fun.

The biggest stat boosts people can get come from the Strength Boost passive skill, followed by the passive boosts tied to production skills. After that come the modifiers from other combat skills. But generally, fighters stick to fighting and crafters stick to crafting—both skill points and time are limited.

Fighters are generally fine as long as they take combat skills and passives. They have their damage boosts, their attack arts, and their base stat modifiers, so there's no need for them to get into crafting. Production skills take time, and a lot of people got into the game because they wanted to do something physical. It's far easier to just take some passive skills.

Meanwhile, crafting is mainly for people who want to make things. They generally take the Dexterity Boost passive and their chosen production skill. Those who main crafting usually invest all their in-game time into that skill. Although they'll develop high base stats due to all that practice, they don't have any skills or arts with high damage modifiers, so they're not good at combat.

But those are just the basics.

Reliable type characters are easy to level. Sometimes they specialize, but they generally have a set list of skills to take. They're the min-maxers, basically.

When it comes to me, I have combat skills and production skills, but I don't have any physical passives. My build would most likely be considered technical or special. To put it simply, technical builds are for a play style that relies heavily on the player. The player makes up for what their build lacks and covers up their own weaknesses with skills. Take Perception and Detect for instance. I can't just suddenly learn to sense killing intent, so I took those skills.

These special characters start with low base stats and take time to level. It's quite hard when your character depends on raising both combat and production. You can't just steamroll through the early game. It takes both equipment and technique to get ahead.

Finally, there are the people who are in it just for fun. As you might expect, they take whatever skills catch their interest. The difference between them and special types is that technical players take all their stat modifiers into consideration.

With that said, all these only apply when planning an initial build. Later on, when everyone's used to the game, they'll pick up whatever skills interest them. Most people end up either as all-rounders or min-maxers by the end.

Ultimately, even when builds are similar, it depends on who's playing. This isn't an MMO where you can attack with a click.

A special type like me could be mainly a crafter who only goes hunting for their materials—I'm sure there are plenty of them around. But if I had to choose, I'd say my focus is on battle.

The game recommends just playing for fun. The tagline is "Your Curiosity is

Key,” and you won’t discover new skills if you just stick to the templates...

It’s a pain to explain, so I just hand my sister the connect board showing my skills.

“Hmm...yeah, you’re a special type. 54 skill points—that’s nice.”

“I need 6 skill points to evolve a skill when it’s ready, right?”

“Yeah, it normally takes 6 to get to the second stage.”

“I don’t have nearly enough to evolve them all, then.”

“I think you can get by with your race skills.”

“I’ll need to think carefully about what I’ll raise.”

“You’ll get SP if you win the martial arts tournament.”

“I’m not interested in PvP, and if I go out there like this... Isn’t Dark Aura too OP?”

“Let’s see...Dark Aura. Whoa, that’s broken.”

Dark Aura can inflict poison, curse, and weaken all at the same time. As potions are currently the only way to recover from status conditions, I think it would be way too strong in a tournament setting.

As of now, the southern and western bosses are the only enemies that use poison. The western boss, a monstrous bee, has a swarm of wasp mobs that make it a real hassle to deal with. You need an AoE to even consider taking it on.

The southern boss has a higher attack and a higher chance to proc poison, so its seen as even more trouble than the western one.

Once we start talking about the game, the conversation naturally turns to the event, and me and Mom listen to Akina prattle on about it.

As a commander, I spent most of my time just watching, though I saw some action toward the end. I mainly just gave orders to the front line and made sure no one was cut off or surrounded. The orders I gave were mostly just telling people not to go too far in or to fall back.

We’ll need better tactics for a battle that’s not on an open plain. The official

site published information on World Quests, and apparently they weren't expecting the commanders to stand back and give orders.

Next time I can choose what role I want to play, and that could lead the event in different directions. Of course, diving into danger might affect the final result, so there are times where it's best to hang back. That attack on the commanders might have been a way to tell us there were other things we could have been doing.

"Hmm...the point is, there's a special system in place during events, and we should enjoy playing a wide variety of roles."

"You're right. It's a full-dive game, and you're supposed to feel like a character in a story. Isn't it interesting to see how your choices change things?"

"Yeah, it's like we're putting on a play in a fantasy world."

"Right. And today, it was like watching a fantasy movie."

"I'd like to try a siege one of these days."

"I can see one happening sometime soon."

"I'll need to get Primura to make some battering rams and catapults!"

"We're going to run out of lumber at this rate..."

Could she make a ballista? I'm sure she could put a crossbow together if she wanted to... The relevant skill is probably Short Bow, or maybe Mechanical Bow or Slingshot.

Not that I'll ever use them. My chest will clearly get in the way if I want to use a bow.

Siege weapons aside, management didn't seem to think that a handful of commanders could reign in that number of players. As Akina said, the goal was to have us learn the system by putting us together as a single army. Also, to use command skills.

They could have assigned roles with AI, but they wanted to give everyone an option. And having us all under one banner would make it easier for the people RPing to join in.

“The tournament is next week. Once that’s over, we might get a summer break event.”

“We probably will. You rarely see an online game these days with no summer event.”

“And you have tests before that.”

“Drat...”

A critical hit from Mother! Akina’s motivation is down.

“A tournament next week and tests the week after that...?”

“The school will have review sessions starting Monday... I can grind when I get home, then participate in the tournament on Saturday...and cram on Sunday for the test...”

“So we’ll be on summer break two weeks from today. Are we visiting Grandma’s house again?”

“Not this year.”

“All right! Then gaming it is!”

I believe you can’t currently connect to the game from overseas. If we went to England, we’d have to put FLFO on hold. I don’t know if Akina would survive.

After eating, I take a bath and clean up, then work on my Cooking a bit more. Once it’s time to log out, I book a room at the inn, stretch, and log out in bed. Then I stretch in real life and go to sleep.

What shall I do tomorrow?

Afterword

HELLO EVERYONE! Nice to meet you. This is Akisuzu Nenohi.

For starters, I'd like to thank you for picking up my debut work. Everyone who came from the web version, how do you like the illustrations? When I saw them, I thought, "Wow, my kid's really grown up..."

Now about this work, *Free Life Fantasy Online*, or FLFO. I wanted to write a fantasy with combat and crafting where no one dies, and so it turned into a Full Dive VRMMO story. Basically meaning it's just a game. As you know, a game must be balanced. I've tried to balance it however I can, but the main character...well, you already know.

If I were to actually make this game a reality, I'd reduce the number of player races and get rid of the extra races, but I don't have to worry about that in a novel. It would definitely be hell to balance so many races in an actual MMO. In a book, it's fine as long as it's fun.

Furthermore, character settings were sacrificed for skills and worldview. In the text, I can only really fit in two lines per character. So I chose name, race, speech pattern, student or working adult, hair color, eye color, equipment, position, and guild—so on and so forth.

When I told a friend about it, he told me that's way too much. He only uses one word when describing anyone. But that's not enough for me.

That said, this work is a first-person narrative, and it takes place in an online game, so that's not much of an issue. It would be stranger to include real-world elements. Since it's in first person, you don't need to show much of the setting, even if you have a really detailed story. I want to write about a game, so I intend to gloss over the real-world stuff.

I don't want to drag this on so let's leave it at this: If I look at the people above me, I see manga adaptations, and anime, and even movies, but my goal is just to get two volumes out. Everyone who read this and found it interesting, please pray with me. Please, God, could you give me a second volume? Pretty

please?

Finally, I would be overjoyed if you kept even a portion of this work in a corner of your mind.

I hope we meet again in Volume 2!

—AKISUZU NENOHI



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